M.r John Dryden

M.r John Dryden

To His GRACE the

Duke of *Newcaſtle*,

Lord Chamberlain of His Majeſty's Houſhold, &c.

My LORD,

IT is the Fortune of this Edition of the Dramatic Works of the late Mr. *Dryden*, to come into the World at a Time, when Your Grace has juſt given Order for Erecting, at Your own Expence, a Noble Monument to his Memory.

This is an Act of Generosity, which has something in it so very Uncommon, that the most unconcern'd and indifferent Persons must be moved with it: How much more, must all such be affected by it, who had any due Regard for the personal Merits of the Deceas'd; or are capable of any Taste and Distinction, for the Remains and elegant Labours of one of the greatest Men that our Nation has produced!

That, which distinguisheth Actions of pure and elevated Generosity, from those of a mix'd and inferiour Nature, is nothing else but the absolutely disinterested Views of the Agent.

My Lord, this being granted, in how fair a Light does your Munificence stand? A Munificence to the Memory, to the Ashes of a Man whom you never saw; whom You never can see: And who, consequently, never could by any personal Obligation, induce You to do this Deed of Bounty; nor can he ever make

make You any Acknowledgement for it when it ſhall be done.

It is evident Your Grace can have acted thus from no other Motive but your pure Regard to Merit, from your intire Love for Learning, and from that accurate Taſte and Diſcernment, which by your Studies You have ſo early attained to in the Politer Arts.

And theſe are the Qualities, my Lord by which You are more diſtinguiſh'd, than by all thoſe other uncommon Advantages with which You are attended. Your great Diſpoſition, Your great Ability to be beneficent to Mankind, could by no means anſwer that End, if You were not poſſeſs'd of a Judgment to direct You in the right Application, and juſt Diſtribution of your good Offices.

You are now in a Station, by which You neceſſarily preſide over the liberal Arts, and all the Practiſers and Profeſſors of them. Poetry is more particu-

larly within your Province: And with very good Reaſon may we hope to ſee it revive and flouriſh, under your Influence and Protection.

What Hopes of Reward may not the living Deſerver entertain, when even the Dead are ſought out for; and their very Urns and Aſhes made Partakers of Your Liberality?

As I have the Honour to be known to You, my Lord, and to have been diſtinguiſh'd by You, by many Expreſſions and Inſtances of your Good-will towards me; I take a ſingular Pleaſure to congratulate You upon an Action ſo intirely Worthy of You. And as I had the Happineſs to be very Converſant, and as intimately acquainted, with Mr. *Dryden*, as the great Diſproportion in our Years could allow me to be; I hope it will not be thought too aſſuming in me, if in Love to his Memory, and in Gratitude for the many friendly Offices, and favourable Inſtructions, which

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in my early Youth I received from him, I take upon me to make this publick Acknowledgment to your Grace, for ſo publick a Teſtimony as you are pleas'd to give the World, of that high Eſteem in which You hold the Performances of that eminent Man.

I can in ſome Degree juſtify my ſelf for ſo doing, by a Citation of a kind of Right to it, bequeath'd to me by him. And it is, indeed, upon that Pretenſion that I preſume even to make a Dedication of theſe his Works to You.

In ſome very Elegant, tho' very partial Verſes which he did me the Honour to write to me, he recommended it to me to *be kind to his Remains.* I was then, and have been ever ſince moſt ſenſibly touched with that Expreſſion: and the more ſo, becauſe I could not find in my ſelf the Means of ſatisfying the Paſſion which I felt in me, to do ſomething anſwerable to an Injunction laid upon me in ſo

Pathetick and ſo Amicable a Manner.

You, my Lord, have furniſh'd me with ample Means of acquitting my ſelf, both of my Duty and Obligation to my *departed Friend*. What kinder Office lies in me, to do to theſe, his moſt valuable and unperiſhable Remains, than to commit them to the Protection, and lodge them under the Roof of a Patron, whoſe Hoſpitality has extended it ſelf even to his Duſt?

If I would permit my ſelf to run on in the way which ſo fairly opens it ſelf before me, I ſhould tire Your Grace with reiterated Praiſes and Acknowledgments, and I might poſſibly (notwithſtanding my pretended Right ſo to do) give ſome handle to ſuch who are inclinable to Cenſure, to tax me of Affectation and Officiouſneſs; in thanking You, more than comes to my Share, for doing a Thing, which is, in truth, of a Publick Conſideration, as it is

doing

doing an Honour to your Country. For ſo unqueſtionably it is, to do Honour to him, who was an Honour to it.

I have but one thing to ſay either to obviate, or to anſwer ſuch an Objection, if it ſhall be made to me, which is, that I loved Mr. *Dryden*.

I have not touch'd upon any other publick Honour, or Bounty done by You to your Country: I have induſtriouſly declined entring upon a Theme of ſo extenſive a Nature; and of all your numerous and continual Largeſſes to the Publick, I have only ſingled out this, as what moſt particularly affected me. I confeſs freely to Your Grace, I very much admire all thoſe other Donations, but I much more love this; and I cannot help it, if I am naturally more delighted with any thing that is Amiable, than with any thing that is Wonderful.

Whoever ſhall Cenſure me, I dare be confident, You, my Lord, will Excuſe

cuſe me, for any thing that I ſhall ſay with due Regard to a Gentleman, for whoſe Perſon I had as juſt an Affection as I have an Admiration of his Writings. And indeed Mr. *Dryden* had Perſonal Qualities to challenge both Love and Eſteem from All who were truly acquainted with him.

He was of a Nature exceedingly Humane and Compaſſionate; eaſily forgiving Injuries, and capable of a prompt and ſincere Reconciliation with them who had offended him.

Such a Temperament is the only ſolid Foundation of all moral Virtues, and ſociable Endowments. His Friendſhip, where he profeſs'd it, went much beyond his Profeſſions; and I have been told of ſtrong and generous Inſtances of it, by the Perſons themſelves who received them: Tho' his Hereditary Income was little more than a bare Competency.

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As his Reading had been very extenſive, ſo was he very happy in a Memory tenacious of every thing that he had read. He was not more poſſeſs'd of Knowledge than he was Communicative of it. But then his Communication of it was by no means pedantick, or impos'd upon the Converſation; but juſt ſuch, and went ſo far as by the natural Turns of the Diſcourſe in which he was engag'd, it was neceſſarily promoted or required. He was extreme ready and gentle in his Correction of the Errors of any Writer, who thought fit to conſult him; and full as ready and patient to admit of the Reprehenſion of others, in reſpect of his own Overſight or Miſtakes. He was of very eaſy, I may ſay, of very pleaſing Acceſs: But ſomething ſlow, and as it were diffident in his Advances to others. He had ſomething in his Nature that abhorr'd Intruſion into any Society whatſoever. Indeed it is to be regretted, that he was

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rather blameable in the other Extreme: For by that means he was Perſonally leſs known, and conſequently his Character might become liable both to Miſapprehenſions and Miſrepreſentations.

To the beſt of my Knowledge and Obſervation, he was, of all the Men that ever I knew, one of the moſt Modeſt, and the moſt Eaſily to be diſcountenanced, in his Approaches, either to his Superiors, or his Equals.

I have given Your Grace this ſlight Sketch of his perſonal Character, as well to vindicate his Memory, as to juſtifie my ſelf for the Love which I bore to his Perſon; and I have the rather done it, becauſe I hope it may be acceptable to You, to know that he was worthy of the Diſtinction You have ſhewn him, as a Man, as well as an Author.

As to his Writings, I ſhall not take upon me to ſpeak of them; for, to ſay little of them, would not be to do them right: And to ſay all that I ought to ſay,

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would be, to be very Voluminous. But, I may venture to ſay in general Terms, that no Man hath written in our Language ſo much, and ſo various Matter, and in ſo various Manners, ſo well. Another thing I may ſay very peculiar to him; which is, that his Parts did not decline with his Years: But that he was an improving Writer to his laſt, even to near ſeventy Years of Age; improving even in Fire and Imagination, as well as in Judgment: Witneſs his Ode on St. *Cecilia*'s Day, and his Fables, his lateſt Performances.

He was equally excellent in Verſe, and in Proſe. His Proſe had all the Clearneſs imaginable, together with all the Nobleneſs of Expreſſion; all the Graces and Ornaments proper and peculiar to it, without deviating into the Language or Diction of Poetry. I make this Obſervation, only to diſtinguiſh his Style from that of many Poetical Writers, who meaning to write harmo-

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niouſly in Proſe, do in truth often write meer Blank Verſe.

I have heard him frequently own with Pleaſure, that if he had any Talent for *Engliſh* Proſe, it was owing to his having often read the Writings of the great Archbiſhop *Tillotſon*.

His Verſification and his Numbers he could learn of no Body: For he firſt poſſeſs'd thoſe Talents in Perfection in our Tongue. And they who have beſt ſucceeded in them ſince his Time, have been indebted to his Example; and the more they have been able to imitate him, the better have they ſucceeded.

As his Style in Proſe is always ſpecifically different from his Style in Poetry; ſo, on the other hand, in his Poems, his Diction is, where-ever his Subject requires it, ſo Sublimely, and ſo truly Poetical, that its Eſſence, like that of pure Gold, cannot be deſtroy'd. Take his Verſes, and diveſt them of their Rhimes, disjoint them in their Numbers,

bers, tranſpoſe their Expreſſions, make what Arrangement and Diſpoſition you pleaſe of his Words, yet ſhall there Eternally be Poetry, and ſomething which will be found incapable of being reſolv'd into abſolute Proſe: An inconteſtable Characteriſtick of a truly poetical Genius.

I will ſay but one Word more in general of his Writings, which is, that what he has done in any one Species, or diſtinct Kind, would have been ſufficient to have acquir'd him a great Name. If he had written nothing but his Prefaces, or nothing but his Songs, or his Prologues, each of them would have intituled him to the Preference and Diſtinction of excelling in his Kind.

But I have forgot my ſelf; for nothing can be more unneceſſary than an Attempt to ſay any thing to Your Grace, in Commendation of the Writings of this great Poet; ſince it is only to your Knowledge, Taſte and Approbation of them,

them, that the Monument which You are now about to raiſe to him is owing. I will therefore, my Lord, detain You no longer by this Epiſtle; and only intreat You to believe, that it is addreſs'd to Your Grace, from no other Motive than a ſincere Regard to the Memory of Mr. *Dryden*, and a very ſenſible Pleaſure which I take in applauding an Action by which You are ſo juſtly, and ſo ſingularly entitled to a Dedication of his Labours, tho' many Years after his Death; and even tho' moſt of them were produced by him many Years before You were born.

I am with the greateſt Reſpect,

My LORD,

Your GRACE's

moſt Obedient and

moſt Humble Servant,

William Congreve.

OF

Dramatick POESY,

AN

ESSAY.

——— *Fungar vice Cotis, acutum*
Reddere quæ Ferrum valet, exors ipſa ſecandi.
Horat. de Arte Poet.

OF

Dramatick POESY,

AN

ESSAY.

To the Right Honourable

CHARLES

Earl of *Dorſet* and *Middleſex*,

Lord Chamberlain of their Majeſties Houſhold, Knight of the moſt Noble Order of the Garter, &c.

My Lord,

AS I was lately reviewing my looſe Papers, among the reſt I found this Eſſay; the writing of which in this rude and indigeſted manner, wherein your Lordſhip now ſees it, ſerv'd as an Amuſement to me in the Country, when the violence of the laſt Plague had driven me from the Town. Seeing then our Theaters ſhut up, I was engag'd in theſe kind of Thoughts with the ſame Delight, with which Men think upon their abſent Miſtreſſes. I confeſs I find many things in this Diſcourſe, which I do not now approve; my Judgment being not a little alter'd ſince the writing of it; but whether for the better or the worſe I know not: Neither indeed is it much

much material in an Eſſay, where all I have ſaid is problematical. For the way of writing Plays in Verſe, which I have ſeem'd to favour, I have, ſince that time, laid the Practice of it aſide, 'till I have more leiſure, becauſe I find it troubleſome and ſlow. But I am no way alter'd from my Opinion of it, at leaſt with any Reaſons which have oppos'd it. For your Lordſhip may eaſily obſerve, that none are very violent againſt it, but thoſe who either have not attempted it, or who have ill ſucceeded in their Attempt. 'Tis enough for me to have your Lordſhip's Example for my Excuſe in that little which I have done in it; and I am ſure my Adverſaries can bring no ſuch Arguments againſt Verſe, as thoſe with which the fourth Act of *Pompey* will furniſh me in its Defence. Yet, My Lord, you muſt ſuffer me a little to complain of you, that you too ſoon withdraw from us a Contentment, of which we expected the continuance, becauſe you gave it us ſo early. 'Tis a Revolt, without occaſion, from your Party, where your Merits had already rais'd you to the higheſt Commands, and where you have not the excuſe of other Men, that you have been ill us'd, and therefore laid down Arms. I know no other Quarrel you can have to Verſe, than that which *Spurina* had to his Beauty, when he tore and mangled the Features of his Face, only becauſe they pleas'd too well the Sight. It was an Honour which ſeem'd to wait for you, to lead out a new Colony of Writers from the Mother-Nation: And upon the firſt ſpreading of your Enſigns, there had been many in a readineſs to have follow'd ſo fortunate a Leader; if not all, yet the better part of Poets.

Pars indocili melior grege; mollis & exſpes
Innominata perprimat cubilia.

I am almoſt of Opinion, that we ſhould force you to accept of the Command, as ſometimes the *Prætorian* Bands have compell'd their Captains to receive the Empire. The Court, which is the beſt and ſureſt Judge of Writing, has generally allow'd of Verſe; and in the Town it has found Favourers of Wit and Quality. As for your own particular, My Lord, you have yet Youth and Time enough, to give part of them to the Divertiſement of the Publick, before you enter into the ſerious and more unpleaſant Buſineſs of the World. That which the *French* Poet ſaid of the Temple of Love, may be as well apply'd to the Temple of the Muſes. The words, as near as I can remember them, were theſe:

Le jeune homme, à mauvaiſe Grace,
N'ayant pas adoré dans le Temple d'Amour:
Il faut qu'il entre, & pour le ſage
Si ce n'eſt pas ſon vray ſejour,
C'eſt un giſte ſur ſon paſſage.

I leave the Words to work their Effect upon your Lordſhip in their own Language, becauſe no other can ſo well expreſs the Nobleneſs of the Thought; and wiſh you may be ſoon call'd to bear a part in the Affairs of the Nation, where I know the World expects you, and wonders why you have been ſo long forgotten; there being no Perſon amongſt our young Nobility, on whom the Eyes of all Men are ſo much bent. But, in the mean time, your Lordſhip may imitate the Courſe of Nature, who gives us the Flower before the Fruit: That I may ſpeak to you in the Language of the Muſes, which I have taken from an excellent Poem to the King:

As Nature, when ſhe Fruit deſigns, thinks fit
By beauteous Bloſſoms to proceed to it;
And while ſhe does accompliſh all the Spring,
Birds to her ſecret Operations ſing.

I confeſs, I have no greater Reaſon, in Addreſſing this Eſſay to your Lordſhip, than that it might awaken in you the deſire of writing ſomething, in whatever kind it be, which might be an Honour to our Age and Country. And methinks it might have the ſame Effect on you, which *Homer* tells us the Fight of the *Greeks* and *Trojans* before the Fleet, had on the Spirit of *Achilles*; who, tho' he had reſolv'd not to ingage, yet found a Martial Warmth to ſteal upon him, at the Sight of Blows, the Sound of Trumpets, and the Cries of fighting Men. For my own part, if, in treating of this Subject, I ſometimes diſſent from the Opinion of better Wits, I declare it is not ſo much to combate their Opinions, as to defend my own, which were firſt made publick. Sometimes, like a Scholar in a Fencing-School, I put forth my ſelf, and ſhow my own ill Play, on purpoſe to be better taught. Sometimes I ſtand deſperately to my Arms, like the Foot when deſerted by their Horſe, not in hope to overcome, but only to yield on more Honourable Terms. And yet, my Lord, this War of Opinions, you well know, has fallen out among the Writers of all Ages, and ſometimes betwixt Friends. Only it has been proſecuted by ſome, like Pedants, with violence of Words; and manag'd by others like Gentlemen, with Candour and Civility. Even *Tully* had a Controverſy with his dear *Atticus*; and in one of his Dialogues makes him ſuſtain the part of an Enemy in Philoſophy, who in his Letters is his Confident of State, and made privy to the moſt weighty Affairs of the *Roman* Senate. And the ſame Reſpect which was paid by *Tully* to *Atticus*, we find return'd to him afterwards by *Cæſar*, on a like occaſion, who, anſwering his Book in praiſe of *Cato*, made it not ſo much his Buſineſs to condemn *Cato*, as to praiſe *Cicero*.

But

But that I may decline ſome part of the Encounter with my Adverſaries, whom I am neither willing to combate, nor well able to reſiſt; I will give your Lordſhip the Relation of a Diſpute betwixt ſome of our Wits on the ſame Subject, in which they did not only ſpeak of Plays in Verſe, but mingled, in the freedom of Diſcourſe, ſome things of the Ancient, many of the Modern ways of Writing; comparing thoſe with theſe, and the Wits of our Nation with thoſe of others: 'Tis true, they differ'd in their Opinions, as 'tis probable they would: Neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them: And that as *Tacitus* profeſſes of himſelf, *Sine ſtudio partium aut irâ:* Without Paſſion or Intereſt; leaving your Lordſhip to decide it in Favour of which Part you ſhall judge moſt reaſonable, and withal, to pardon the many Errors of

Your Lordſhip's

moſt Obedient Humble Servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

TO THE
READER.

THE Drift of the enſuing Diſcourſe was chiefly to vindicate the Honour of our Engliſh *Writers, from the Cenſure of thoſe who unjuſtly prefer the* French *before them. This I intimate, leſt any ſhould think me ſo exceeding vain, as to teach others an Art, which they underſtand much better than my ſelf. But if this incorrect Eſſay, written in the Country, without the Help of Books, or Advice of Friends, ſhall find any Acceptance in the World, I promiſe to my ſelf a better Succeſs of the Second Part, wherein I ſhall more fully Treat of the Virtues and Faults of the* Engliſh *Poets, who have written either in this, the Epique, or the Lyrique way.*

AN

AN

ESSAY

OF

Dramatick Poesy.

IT was that memorable Day, in the first Summer of the late War, when our Navy ingag'd the *Dutch:* A Day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed Fleets which any Age had ever seen, disputed the Command of the greater half of the Globe, the Commerce of Nations, and the Riches of the Universe. While these vast floating Bodies, on either side, mov'd against each other in parallel Lines, and our Country-men, under the happy Conduct of his Roy al Highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the Line of the Enemies; the Noise of the Cannon from both Navies reach'd our Ears about the City: So that all Men, being alarm'd with it, and in a dreadful Suspense of the Event, which they knew was then deciding, every one went following the Sound as his Fancy led him; and leaving the Town almost empty, some took towards the

Park, ſome croſs the River, others down it; all ſeeking the Noiſe in the Depth of Silence.

Amongſt the reſt, it was the Fortune of *Eugenius*, *Crites*, *Liſideius* and *Neander*, to be in Company together: Three of them Perſons whom their Wit and Quality have made known to all the Town: And whom I have choſe to hide under theſe borrowed Names, that they may not ſuffer by ſo ill a Relation as I am going to make of their Diſcourſe.

Taking then a Barge which a Servant of *Liſideius* had provided for them, they made haſte to ſhoot the Bridge, and left behind them that great fall of Waters which hindred them from hearing what they deſir'd: After which, having diſingag'd themſelves from many Veſſels which rode at Anchor in the *Thames*, and almoſt block'd up the Paſſage towards *Greenwich*, they ordered the Watermen to let fall their Oars more gently; and then every one favouring his own Curioſity with a ſtrict Silence, it was not long ere they perceived the Air to break about them like the Noiſe of diſtant Thunder, or of Swallows in a Chimney: Thoſe little Undulations of Sound, though almoſt vaniſhing before they reach'd them, yet ſtill ſeeming to retain ſomewhat of their firſt Horror which they had betwixt the Fleets: After they had attentively liſtened till ſuch time as the Sound by little and little went from them; *Eugenius* lifting up his Head, and taking Notice of it, was the firſt who congratulated to the reſt that happy Omen of our Nation's Victory: Adding, that we had but this to deſire in Confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that Noiſe which was now leaving the *Engliſh* Coaſt. When the reſt had concurr'd in the ſame Opinion, *Crites*, a Perſon of a ſharp Judgment, and ſomewhat too delicate a Taſte in Wit, which the World hath miſtaken in him for ill Nature, ſaid, ſmiling to us, That if the Concernment of this Battel had not been ſo exceeding great, he could ſcarce have wiſh'd the Victory at the Price he knew he muſt pay for it, in being ſubject to the reading and hearing of ſo many ill Verſes, as he was ſure would be made on that Subject. Adding, That

no

no Argument could ſcape ſome of thoſe eternal Rhymers, who watch a Battel with more diligence than the Ravens and Birds of Prey; and the worſt of them ſureſt to be firſt in upon the Quarry, while the better able, either out of Modeſty writ not at all, or ſet that due Value upon their Poems, as to let them be often deſired, and long expected. There are ſome of thoſe impertinent People of whom you ſpeak, anſwer'd *Liſideius*, who, to my Knowledge, are already ſo provided, either way, that they can produce not only a Panegyrick upon the Victory, but, if need be, a Funeral Elegy on the Duke: Wherein, after they have crown'd his Valour with many Laurels, they will at laſt deplore the odds under which he fell, concluding that his Courage deſerv'd a better Deſtiny. All the Company ſmil'd at the Conceit of *Liſideius*; but *Crites*, more eager than before, began to make particular Exceptions againſt ſome Writers, and ſaid, the publick Magiſtrate ought to ſend betimes to forbid them; and that it concern'd the Peace and Quiet of all honeſt People, that ill Poets ſhould be as well ſilenc'd as ſeditious Preachers. In my Opinion, replied *Eugenius*, you purſue your Point too far; for as to my own particular, I am ſo great a Lover of Poeſy, that I could wiſh them all rewarded, who attempt but to do well; at leaſt, I would not have them worſe us'd than one of their Brethren was by *Sylla* the Dictator: *Quem in concione vidimus* (ſays *Tully*) *cum ei libellum malus poeta de populo ſubjeciſſet, quod epigramma in eum feciſſet tantummodo alternis verſibus longiuſculis, ſtatim ex iis rebus quas tunc vendebat jubere ei præmium tribui, ſub ea conditione ne quid poſtea ſcriberet.* I could wiſh with all my Heart, replied *Crites*, that many whom we know, were as bountifully thank'd upon the ſame Condition, that they would never trouble us again. For amongſt others, I have a mortal Apprehenſion of two Poets, whom this Victory, with the help of both her Wings, will never be able to eſcape. 'Tis eaſy to gueſs whom you intend, ſaid *Liſideius*; and without naming them, I aſk you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with Clenches upon Words, and a certain clowniſh kind of Raillery? If now

and then he does not offer at a *Catachresis* or *Clevelandism*, wresting and torturing a Word into another Meaning: In fine, if he be not one of those whom the *French* would call *un mauvais buffon*; one who is so much a well-willer to the Satyr, that he intends, at least, to spare no Man; and though he cannot strike a Blow to hurt any, yet he ought to be punish'd for the Malice of the Action; as our Witches are justly hang'd, because they think themselves to be such: and suffer deservedly for believing they did Mischief, because they meant it. You have describ'd him, said *Crites*, so exactly, that I am afraid to come after you with my other Extremity of Poetry: He is one of those, who having had some advantage of Education and Converse, knows better than the other what a Poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any Man; his Style and Matter are every where alike; he is the most calm, peaceable Writer you ever read: He never disquiets your Passions with the least Concernment, but still leaves you in as even a Temper as he found you; he is a very Leveller in Poetry, he creeps along with ten little Words in every Line, and helps out his Numbers with *For to*, and *Unto*, and all the pretty Expletives he can find, till he drags them to the end of another Line; while the Sense is left tir'd half way behind it: He doubly starves all his Verses, first, for want of Thought, and then of Expression; his Poetry neither has Wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in *Martial*:

Pauper videri Cinna vult, & est pauper:

He affects Plainness, to cover his want of Imagination: When he writes the serious Way, the highest Flight of his Fancy is some miserable *Antithesis*, or seeming Contradiction; and in the Comick, he is still reaching at some thin Conceit, the Ghost of a Jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; these Swallows which we see before us on the *Thames*, are the just Resemblance of his Wit: You may observe how near the Water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it: And when they do, 'tis but the Surface: They skim over it but to catch a

Gnat,

Gnat, and then mount into the Air and leave it. Well, Gentlemen, said *Eugenius*, you may speak your Pleasure of these Authors; but though I and some few more about the Town may give you a peaceable Hearing, yet assure your selves, there are Multitudes who would think you malicious, and them injur'd: Especially him whom you first described: he is the very *Withers* of the City: They have bought more Editions of his Works than would serve to lay under all their Pies at the Lord Mayor's *Christmas*. When his famous Poem first came out in the Year 1660, I have seen them reading it in the midst of Change-time; nay, so vehement they were at it, that they lost their Bargain by the Candles ends: But what will you say if he has been received amongst great Persons? I can assure you, this Day, he is the Envy of one, who is Lord in the Art of Quibbling; and who does not take it well, that any Man should intrude so far into his Province. All I would wish, replied *Crites*, is, That they who love his Writings, may still admire him, and his Fellow Poet, *qui Bavium non odit, &c.* is Curse sufficient. And farther, added *Lisideius*, I believe there is no Man who writes well, but would think he had hard Measure, if their Admirers should Praise any thing of his: *Nam quos contemnimus, eorum quoque laudes contemnimus.* There are so few who write well in this Age, said *Crites*, that methinks any Praises should be welcome; they neither rise to the Dignity of the last Age, nor to any of the Ancients; and we may cry out of the Writers of this time, with more reason than *Petronius* of his, *Pace vestrâ liceat dixisse, primi omnium eloquentiam perdidistis*: You have debauched the true old Poetry so far, that Nature, which is the Soul of it, is not in any of your Writings.

If your Quarrel (said *Eugenius*) to those who now write, be grounded only on your Reverence to Antiquity, there is no Man more ready to adore those great *Greeks* and *Romans* than I am: But on the other side, I cannot think so contemptibly of the Age in which I live, or so dishonourably of my own Country, as not to judge we equal the Ancients in most kinds of Poesy, and in some

surpass them; neither know I any reason why I may not be as zealous for the Reputation of our Age, as we find the Ancients themselves were in Reverence to those who lived before them. For you hear your *Horace* saying,

Indignor quidquam reprehendi, non quia crasse
Compositum, illepidève putetur, sed quia nuper.

And after,

Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
Scire velim pretium chartis quotus arroget annus?

But I see I am ingaging in a wide Dispute, where the Arguments are not like to reach close on either side; for Poesy is of so large an Extent, and so many both of the Ancients and Moderns have done well in all Kinds of it, that in citing one against the other, we shall take up more time this Evening, than each Man's Occasions will allow him: Therefore I would ask *Crites* to what Part of Poesy he would confine his Arguments, and whether he would defend the general Cause of the Ancients against the Moderns, or oppose any Age of the Moderns against this of ours.

Crites a little while considering upon this Demand, told *Eugenius* that if he pleased he would limit their Dispute to *Dramatick Poesy*; in which he thought it not difficult to prove, either that the Ancients were superior to the Moderns, or the last Age to this of ours.

Eugenius was somewhat surpriz'd, when he heard *Crites* make Choice of that Subject; For ought I see, said he, I have undertaken a harder Province than I imagin'd; for though I never judg'd the Plays of the *Greek* or *Roman* Poets comparable to ours; yet on the other side, those we now see acted, come short of many which were written in the last Age: But my Comfort is, if we are o'ercome, it will be only by our own Country-men: And if we yield to them in this one part of Poesy, we more surpass them in all the other; for in the Epique or Lyrick way it will be hard for them to shew us one such amongst them, as we have many now living, or who lately were. They can produce nothing so courtly writ, or which expresses so much the Conversation of a Gentleman, as Sir *John Suckling*; nothing so even, sweet, and flowing

flowing as Mr. *Waller:* Nothing so Majestick, so correct, as Sir *John Denham*; nothing so elevated, so copious, and full of Spirit, as Mr. *Cowley:* As for the *Italian*, *French*, and *Spanish* Plays, I can make it evident, that those who now write, surpass them; and that the *Drama* is wholly ours.

All of them were thus far of *Eugenius* his Opinion, that the Sweetness of *English* Verse was never understood or practis'd by our Fathers; even *Crites* himself did not much oppose it: And every one was willing to acknowledge how much our Poesy is improv'd, by the happiness of some Writers yet living; who first taught us to mould our Thoughts into easy and significant Words; to retrench the Superfluities of Expression, and to make our Rhyme so properly a Part of the Verse, that it should never mislead the Sense, but it self be led and govern'd by it.

Eugenius was going to continue this Discourse, when *Lisideius* told him that it was necessary, before they proceeded further, to take a standing Measure of their Controversy; for how was it possible to be decided who writ the best Plays, before we know what a Play should be? but, this once agreed on by both Parties, each might have Recourse to it, either to prove his own Advantages, or to discover the Failings of his Adversary.

He had no sooner said this, but all desir'd the Favour of him to give the Definition of a Play; and they were the more importunate, because neither *Aristotle*, nor *Horace*, nor any other, who had writ of that Subject, had ever done it.

Lisideius, after some modest Denials, at last confess'd he had a rude Notion of it; indeed rather a Description than a Definition: but which serv'd to guide him in his private Thoughts, when he was to make a Judgment of what others writ: That he conceiv'd a Play ought to be, *A just and lively Image of human Nature, representing its Passions and Humours, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is subject; for the Delight and Instruction of Mankind.*

This Definition (though *Crites* rais'd a Logical Objection against it; that it was only *à genere & fine*, and so,

not

not altogether perfect;) was yet well received by the reſt: And after they had given order to the Water-men to turn their Barge, and row ſoftly, that they might take the cool of the Evening in their return, *Crites*, being deſired by the Company to begin, ſpoke on behalf of the Ancients, in this manner.

If Confidence preſage a Victory, *Eugenius*, in his own Opinion, has already triumphed over the Ancients; nothing ſeems more eaſy to him, than to overcome thoſe whom it is our greateſt Praiſe to have imitated well: for we do not only build upon their Foundations; but by their Models. *Dramatique Poeſie* had time enough, reckoning from *Theſpis* (who firſt invented it) to *Ariſtophanes*, to be born, to grow up, and to flouriſh in Maturity. It has been obſerved of Arts and Sciences, that in one and the ſame Century they have arriv'd to great Perfection; and no wonder, ſince every Age has a kind of Univerſal Genius, which inclines thoſe that live in it to ſome particular Studies: The Work then being puſh'd on by many Hands, muſt of neceſſity go forward.

Is it not evident, in theſe laſt hundred Years (when the Study of Philoſophy has been the Buſineſs of all the *Virtuoſi* in *Chriſtendom*) that almoſt a New Nature has been reveal'd to us? that more Errors of the School have been detected, more uſeful Experiments in Philoſophy have been made, more noble Secrets in Opticks, Medicine, Anatomy, Aſtronomy, diſcover'd, than in all thoſe credulous and doting Ages from *Ariſtotle* to us? So true it is that nothing ſpreads more faſt than Science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

Add to this, the more than common Emulation that was in thoſe times of writing well; which though it be found in all Ages, and all Perſons that pretend to the ſame Reputation; yet Poeſy being then in more Eſteem than now it is, had greater Honours decreed to the Profeſſors of it; and conſequently the Rivalſhip was more high between them; they had Judges ordain'd to decide their Merit, and Prizes to reward it; and Hiſtorians have been diligent to record of *Æſchylus*, *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, *Lycophron*, and the reſt of them, both who they were

were that vanquiſſi'd in theſe Wars of the Theatre, and how often they were crown'd: While the *Aſian* Kings and *Grecian* Common-wealths ſcarce afforded them a nobler Subject, than the unmanly Luxuries of a debauch'd Court, or giddy Intrigues of a Factious City. *Alit æmulatio ingenia* (ſaith *Paterculus*) *& nunc invidia, nunc admiratio incitationem accendit:* Emulation is the Spur of Wit, and ſometimes Envy, ſometimes Admiration quickens our Endeavours.

But now ſince the Rewards of Honour are taken away, that virtuous Emulation is turn'd into direct Malice; yet ſo ſlothful, that it contents it ſelf to condemn and cry down others, without attempting to do better; 'Tis a Reputation too unprofitable, to take the neceſſary Pains for it; yet wiſhing they had it, that Deſire is incitement enough to hinder others from it. And this, in ſhort, *Eugenius,* is the reaſon, why you have now ſo few good Poets; and ſo many ſevere Judges: Certainly, to imitate the Ancients well, much Labour and ſtrong Study is required: Which Pains, I have already ſhewn, our Poets would want incouragement to take, if yet they had Ability to go through the Work. Thoſe Ancients have been faithful Imitators, and wiſe Obſervers of that Nature which is ſo torn and ill repreſented in our Plays; they have handed down to us a perfect Reſemblance of her; which we, like ill Copyers, neglecting to look on, have rendred monſtrous, and diſfigur'd. But, that you may know how much you are indebted to thoſe your Maſters, and be aſhamed to have ſo ill requited them: I muſt remember you, that all the Rules by which we practiſe the *Drama* at this Day, (either ſuch as relate to the Juſtneſs and Symmetry of the Plot; or the Epiſodical Ornaments, ſuch as Deſcriptions, Narrations, and other Beauties, which are not eſſential to the Play;) were delivered to us from the Obſervations which *Ariſtotle* made, of thoſe Poets, who either lived before him, or were his Contemporaries: We have added nothing of our own, except we have the Confidence to ſay our Wit is better; Of which none boaſt in this our Age, but ſuch as underſtand not theirs. Of that Book which *Ariſtotle* has

has left us, περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς, *Horace* his Art of Poetry, is an excellent Comment, and, I believe, restores to us that second Book of his concerning Comedy, which is wanting in him.

Out of these two have been extracted the famous Rules which the *French* call, *Des Trois Unitez*, or, The Three Unities, which ought to be observ'd in every regular Play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action.

The Unity of Time they comprehend in twenty four Hours, the compass of a Natural Day; or as near it as can be contriv'd: And the Reason of it is obvious to every one, that the Time of the feigned Action, or Fable of the Play, should be proportion'd as near as can be to the Duration of that Time in which it is represented; since therefore all Plays are acted on the Theatre in a space of Time much within the compass of twenty four Hours, that Play is to be thought the neareſt Imitation of Nature, whose Plot or Action is confin'd within that Time; and, by the same Rule which concludes this general Proportion of Time, it follows, that all the Parts of it are (as near as may be) to be equally sub-divided; namely, that one Act take not up the suppos'd Time of half a day; which is out of Proportion to the rest; since the other four are then to be straitned within the Compass of the remaining half; for it is unnatural, that one Act, which being spoke or written, is not longer than the rest, should be suppos'd longer by the Audience; 'tis therefore the Poet's Duty, to take care that no Act should be imagin'd to exceed the Time in which it is represented on the Stage; and that the Intervals and Inequalities of Time be suppos'd to fall out between the Acts.

This Rule of Time how well it has been observ'd by the Ancients, most of their Plays will witness; you see them in their Tragedies (wherein to follow this Rule, is certainly most difficult) from the very Beginning of their Plays, falling close into that part of the Story which they intend for the Action or principal Object of it: Leaving the former Part to be delivered by Narration: So that they set the Audience, as it were, at the Post where the Race is to be concluded: And saving them the tedious

tedious Expectation of seeing the Poet set out and ride the Beginning of the Course, they suffer you not to behold him, till he is in sight of the Goal, and just upon you.

For the Second Unity, which is that of Place, the Ancients meant by it, That the Scene ought to be continued through the Play, in the same Place where it was laid in the Beginning: For the Stage, on which it is represented, being but one and the same Place, it is unnatural to conceive it many; and those far distant from one another. I will not deny, but by the Variation of painted Scenes, the Fancy (which in these Cases will contribute to its own Deceit) may sometimes imagine it several Places, with some Appearance of Probability; yet it still carries the greater likelihood of Truth, if those Places be suppos'd so near each other, as in the same Town or City, which may all be comprehended under the larger Denomination of one Place: For a greater Distance will bear no proportion to the shortness of time, which is allotted in the Acting, to pass from one of them to another. For the Observation of this, next to the Ancients, the *French* are to be most commended. They tye themselves so strictly to the Unity of Place, that you never see in any of their Plays, a Scene chang'd in the middle of an Act: If the Act begins in a Garden, a Street, or Chamber, 'tis ended in the same Place; and that you may know it to be the same, the Stage is so supplied with Persons, that it is never empty all the time: He who enters second has Business with him who was on before; and before the second quits the Stage, a third appears who has Business with him.

This *Corneille* calls *La Liaison des Scenes*, the Continuity or joining of the Scenes; and 'tis a good Mark of a well contriv'd Play, when all the Persons are known to each other, and every one of them has some Affairs with all the rest.

As for the Third Unity, which is that of Action, the Ancients meant no other by it than what the Logicians do by their *Finis*, the End or Scope of any Action; That which is the first in Intention, and last in Execution:

tion: Now the Poet is to aim at one great and compleat Action, to the carrying on of which all things in his Play, even the very Obstacles, are to be subservient; and the Reason of this is as evident as any of the former.

For two Actions equally labour'd and driven on by the Writer, would destroy the Unity of the Poem; it would be no longer one Play, but two: Not but that there may be many Actions in a Play, as *Ben. Johnson* has observ'd in his *Discoveries*, but they must be all subservient to the great one, which our Language happily expresses in the Name of Under-plots: Such as in *Terence*'s *Eunuch* is the difference and reconcilement of *Thais* and *Phædria*, which is not the chief Business of the Play, but promotes the Marriage of *Chærea* and *Chremes*'s Sister, principally intended by the Poet. There ought to be but one Action, says *Corneille*, that is, one compleat Action which leaves the Mind of the Audience in a full Repose: but this cannot be brought to pass, but by many other imperfect Actions which conduce to it, and hold the Audience in a delightful Suspense of what will be.

If by these Rules (to omit any other drawn from the Precepts and Practice of the Ancients) we should judge our modern Plays; 'tis probable, that few of them would endure the Tryal: That which should be the Business of a Day, takes up in some of them an Age; instead of one Action they are the Epitomes of a Man's Life; and for one Spot of Ground (which the Stage should represent) we are sometimes in more Countries than the Map can show us.

But if we will allow the Ancients to have contriv'd well, we must acknowledge them to have written better. Questionless we are deprived of a great Stock of Wit in the loss of *Menander* amongst the *Greek* Poets, and of *Cæcilius*, *Afranius*, and *Varius* among the *Romans*. We may guess at *Menander's* Excellency, by the Plays of *Terence*, who translated some of them; And yet wanted so much of him, that he was called by *C. Cæsar* the Half-*Menander*; and may judge of *Varius*, by the Testimonies of *Horace*, *Martial*, and *Velleius Paterculus*: 'Tis pro-

probable that these, could they be recover'd, would decide the Controversy; but so long as *Aristophanes* and *Plautus* are extant; while the Tragedies of *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, and *Seneca* are in our Hands, I can never see one of those Plays which are now written, but it encreases my Admiration of the Ancients; and yet I must acknowledge further, that to admire them as we ought, we should understand them better than we do. Doubtless many things appear flat to us, the Wit of which depended on some Custom or Story which never came to our Knowledge; or perhaps on some Criticism in their Language, which being so long dead, and only remaining in their Books, 'tis not possible they shou'd make us understand perfectly. To read *Macrobius*, explaining the Propriety and Elegancy of many Words in *Virgil*, which I had before pass'd over without consideration, as common things, is enough to assure me that I ought to think the same of *Terence*; and that in the Purity of his Style (which *Tully* so much valued, that he ever carried his Works about him) there is yet left in him great room for Admiration, if I knew but where to place it. In the mean time, I must desire you to take notice, that the greatest Man of the last Age (*Ben. Johnson*) was willing to give place to them in all things: He was not only a profess'd Imitator of *Horace*, but a learned Plagiary of all the others; you track him every where in their Snow. If *Horace*, *Lucan*, *Petronius Arbiter*, *Seneca*, and *Juvenal*, had their own from him, there are few serious Thoughts which are new in him; you will pardon me therefore, if I presume he lov'd their Fashion when he wore their Cloaths. But since I have otherwise a great veneration for him, and you, *Eugenius*, prefer him above all other Poets, I will use no further Arguments to you than his Example: I will produce before you Father *Ben.* dress'd in all the Ornaments and Colours of the Ancients, you will need no other Guide to our Party, if you follow him; and whether you consider the bad Plays of our Age, or regard the good Plays of the last, both the best

best and worst of the modern Poets, will equally instruct you to admire the Ancients.

Crites had no sooner left speaking, but *Eugenius*, who had waited with some Impatience for it, thus began:

I have observed in your Speech, that the former Part of it is convincing, as to what the Moderns have profited by the Rules of the Ancients; but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excell'd them: We own all the Helps we have from them, and want neither Veneration nor Gratitude, while we acknowledge, that to overcome them we must make use of the Advantages we have received from them; but to these Assistances we have join'd our own Industry; for (had we sat down with a dull Imitation of them) we might then have lost somewhat of the old Perfection, but never acquir'd any that was new. We draw not therefore after their Lines, but those of Nature; and having the Life before us, besides the Experience of all they knew, it is no wonder if we hit some Airs and Features which they have miss'd. I deny not what you urge of Arts and Sciences, that they have flourished in some Ages more than others; but your Instance in Philosophy makes for me: For if Natural Causes be more known now than in the time of *Aristotle*, because more studied, it follows, that Poesy and other Arts may, with the same Pains, arrive still nearer to Perfection; and, that granted, it will rest for you to prove, that they wrought more perfect Images of human Life, than we; which, seeing in your Discourse you have avoided to make good, it shall now be my task to shew you some Part of their Defects, and some few Excellencies of the Moderns; and I think there is none among us can imagine I do it enviously, or with purpose to detract from them; for what Interest of Fame or Profit can the living lose by the Reputation of the dead; on the other side, it is a great Truth which *Velleius Paterculus* affirms, *Audita visis libentius laudamus; & præsentia invidiâ, præterita admiratione prosequimur; & his nos obrui, illis instrui credimus:* That Praise or Censure is certainly the most sincere, which unbrib'd Posterity shall give us.

Be

Be pleased then, in the first Place, to take notice, that the *Greek* Poesy, which *Crites* has affirm'd to have arriv'd to Perfection in the Reign of the old Comedy, was so far from it, that the Distinction of it into Acts was not known to them; or if it were, it is yet so darkly deliver'd to us, that we cannot make it out.

All we know of it is from the singing of their Chorus, and that too is so uncertain, that in some of their Plays we have reason to conjecture they sung more than five times. *Aristotle* indeed divides the integral Parts of a Play into four: First, the *Protasis*, or Entrance, which gives light only to the Characters of the Persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the Action: Secondly, the *Epitasis*, or working up of the Plot, where the Play grows warmer: The Design or Action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass: Thirdly, the *Catastasis*, call'd by the *Romans*, *Status*, the Height, and full Growth of the Play: We may call it properly the Counter-turn, which destroys that Expectation, imbroils the Action in new Difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you; as you may have observed in a violent Stream, resisted by a narrow Passage; it runs round to an Eddy, and carries back the Waters with more swiftness than it brought them on. Lastly, the *Catastrophe*, which the *Grecians* call'd λύσις, the *French*, *le denouement*, and we, the discovery or unravelling of the Plot: There you see all things settling again upon their first Foundations, and the Obstacles which hindred the Design or Action of the Play once remov'd, it ends with that Resemblance of Truth and Nature, that the Audience are satisfied with the Conduct of it. Thus this great Man deliver'd to us the Image of a Play, and I must confess it is so lively, that from thence much light has been deriv'd to the forming it more perfectly into Acts and Scenes; but what Poet first limited to five the Number of the Acts I know not; only we see it so firmly establish'd in the time of *Horace*, that he gives it for a Rule in Comedy; *Neu brevior quinto, neu sit productior actu:* So that you see the *Grecians* cannot be said

to

to have consummated this Art: writing rather by Entrances, than by Acts; and having rather a general indigested Notion of a Play, than knowing how, and where to bestow the particular Graces of it.

But since the *Spaniards* at this Day allow but three Acts, which they call *Jornadas*, to a Play; and the *Italians*, in many of theirs follow them; when I condemn the Ancients, I declare it is not altogether because they have not five Acts to every Play, but because they have not confin'd themselves to one certain Number; 'tis building an House without a Model: And when they succeeded in such Undertakings, they ought to have sacrific'd to Fortune, not to the Muses.

Next, for the Plot, which *Aristotle* call'd ὁ μῦθος, and often τῶν πραγμάτων σύνθεσις, and from him the *Romans Fabula*, it has already been judiciously observ'd by a late Writer, that in their Tragedies it was only some Tale deriv'd from *Thebes* or *Troy*, or at least some thing that happen'd in those two Ages; which was worn so thread-bare by the Pens of all the Epique Poets, and even by Tradition it self of the Talkative *Greeklings* (as *Ben. Johnson* calls them) that before it came upon the Stage, it was already known to all the Audience: And the People, so soon as ever they heard the Name of *Oedipus*, knew as well as the Poet, that he had kill'd his Father by a Mistake, and committed Incest with his Mother, before the Play; that they were now to hear of a great Plague, an Oracle, and the Ghost of *Laius*: So that they sate with a yawning kind of Expectation, till he was to come with his Eyes pull'd out, and spake a hundred or more Verses in a Tragick Tone, in complaint of his Misfortunes. But one *Oedipus*, *Hercules*, or *Medea*, had been tolerable; poor People, they scap'd not so good cheap: they had still the *Chapon Bouillé* set before them, till their Appetites were cloy'd with the same Dish, and the Novelty being gone, the Pleasure vanish'd: So that one main End of *Dramatick Poesy* in its Definition, which was to cause Delight, was of consequence destroy'd.

In

In their Comedies, The *Romans* generally borrow'd their Plots from the *Greek* Poets; and theirs was commonly a little Girl ſtollen or wandred from her Parents, brought back unknown to the City, there got with Child by ſome lewd young Fellow; who, by the help of his Servant, cheats his Father: and when her time comes, to cry *Juno Lucina fer opem*; one or other ſees a little Box or Cabinet which was carried away with her, and ſo diſcovers her to her Friends, if ſome God do not prevent it, by coming down in a Machine, and taking the thanks of it to himſelf.

By the Plot you may gueſs much of the Characters of the Perſons. An old Father, who would willingly before he dies ſee his Son well married; his debauch'd Son, kind in his Nature to his Miſtreſs, but miſerably in want of Money; a Servant or Slave, who has ſo much Wit to ſtrike in with him, and help to dupe his Father, a Braggadochio Captain, a Paraſite, and a Lady of Pleaſure.

As for the poor honeſt Maid, on whom the Story is built, and who ought to be one of the principal Actors in the Play, ſhe is commonly a Mute in it: She has the breeding of the Old *Elizabeth* way, which was for Maids to be ſeen, and not to be heard; and it is enough you know ſhe is willing to be married, when the Fifth Act requires it.

Theſe are Plots built after the *Italian* Mode of Houſes, you ſee through them all at once; the Characters are indeed the Imitations of Nature, but ſo narrow as if they had imitated only an Eye or an Hand, and did not dare to venture on the Lines of a Face, or the Proportion of a Body.

But in how ſtraight a compaſs ſoever they have bounded their Plots and Characters, we will paſs it by, if they have regularly purſued them, and perfectly obſerv'd thoſe three Unities of Time, Place and Action: the knowledge of which you ſay is deriv'd to us from them. But in the firſt Place give me leave to tell you, that the Unity of Place, however it might be practiſed by them, was never any of their Rules: We neither find

find it in *Aristotle*, *Horace*, or any who have written of it, till in our Age the *French* Poets first made it a Precept of the Stage. The Unity of Time, even *Terence* himself (who was the best and most regular of them) has neglected: His *Heautontimorumenos* or Self-punisher takes up visibly two Days, says *Scaliger*; the two first Acts concluding the first Day, the three last the Day ensuing; and *Euripides*, in tying himself to one Day, has committed an Absurdity never to be forgiven him: For in one of his Tragedies he has made *Theseus* go from *Athens* to *Thebes*, which was about forty *English* Miles, under the Walls of it to give Battel, and appear Victorious in the next Act; and yet from the time of his Departure to the return of the *Nuntius*, who gives the Relation of his Victory, *Æthra* and the Chorus have but thirty six Verses; which is not for every Mile a Verse.

The like Error is as evident in *Terence* his *Eunuch*, when *Laches*, the old Man, enters by mistake into the House of *Thais*, where betwixt his Exit, and the Entrance of *Pythias*, who comes to give ample Relation of the Disorders he has rais'd within, *Parmeno* who was left upon the Stage, has not above five Lines to speak: *C'est bien employer un temps si court*, says the *French* Poet, who furnish'd me with one of the Observations: And almost all their Tragedies will afford us Examples of the like Nature.

'Tis true, they have kept the Continuity, or as you call'd it, *Liaison des Scenes*, somewhat better: two do not perpetually come in together, talk, and go out together; and other two succeed them, and do the same throughout the Act, which the *English* call by the Name of single Scenes; but the reason is, because they have seldom above two or three Scenes, properly so call'd, in every Act; for it is to be accounted a new Scene, not only every time the Stage is empty, but every Person who enters, tho' to others, makes it so; because he introduces a new Business: Now the Plots of their Plays being narrow, and the Persons few, one of their Acts was written in a less compass than one of our well-wrought

Scenes,

Scenes, and yet they are often deficient even in this: To go no further than *Terence*, you find in the *Eunuch*, *Antipho* entring single in the midst of the third Act, after *Chremes* and *Pythias* were gone off: In the same Play you have likewise *Dorias* beginning the fourth Act alone; and after she has made a Relation of what was done at the Soldier's entertainment (which by the way was very inartificial, because she was presum'd to speak directly to the Audience, and to acquaint them with what was Necessary to be known, but yet should have been so contriv'd by the Poet, as to have been told by Persons of the *Drama* to one another, and so by them to have come to the Knowledge of the People) she quits the Stage, and *Phædria* enters next, alone likewise: He also gives you an Account of himself, and of his returning from the Country in *Monologue*, to which unnatural way of Narration *Terence* is subject in all his Plays: In his *Adelphi* or Brothers, *Syrus* and *Demea* enter; after the Scene was broken by the Departure of *Sostrata*, *Geta* and *Canthara*; and indeed you can scarce look into any of his Comedies, where you will not presently discover the same Interruption.

But as they have fail'd both in laying of their Plots, and in the Management, swerving from the Rules of their own Art, by mis-representing Nature to us, in which they have ill satisfied one Intention of a Play, which was Delight; so in the instructive Part they have err'd worse: Instead of punishing Vice, and rewarding Virtue, they have often shewn a prosperous Wickedness, and an unhappy Piety: They have set before us a bloody Image of Revenge in *Medea*, and given her Dragons to convey her safe from Punishment. A *Priam* and *Astyanax* murder'd, and *Cassandra* ravish'd, and the Lust and Murder ending in the Victory of him who acted them. In short, there is no Indecorum in any of our modern Plays, which, if I would excuse, I could not shadow with some Authority from the Ancients.

And one farther Note of them let me leave you: Tragedies and Comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same Person; but he who found

found his Genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain, that I need not instance to you, that *Aristophanes*, *Plautus*, *Terence*, never any of them writ a Tragedy; *Æschylus*, *Euripides*, *Sophocles* and *Seneca* never meddled with Comedy: The Sock and Buskin were not worn by the same Poet. Having then so much care to excel in one kind, very little is to be pardon'd them if they miscarried in it; and this would lead me to the Consideration of their Wit, had not *Crites* given me sufficient Warning not to be too bold in my Judgment of it; because the Languages being dead, and many of the Customs, and little Accidents on which it depended, lost to us, we are not competent Judges of it. But tho' I grant, that here and there we may miss the Application of a Proverb or a Custom, yet a thing well said will be Wit in all Languages; and tho' it may lose something in the Translation, yet to him who reads it in the Original, 'tis still the same; He has an Idea of its Excellency, tho' it cannot pass from his Mind into any other Expression or Words than those in which he finds it. When *Phædria* in the *Eunuch* had a Command from his Mistress to be absent two Days, and encouraging himself to go through with it, said, *Tandem ego non illâ caream, si opus sit, vel totum triduum? Parmeno*, to mock the Softness of his Master, lifting up his Hands and Eyes, cries out as it were in admiration, *Hui! universum triduum!* the Elegancy of which *universum*, tho' it cannot be rendred in our Language, yet leaves an Impression on our Souls: But this happens seldom in him, in *Plautus* oftner; who is infinitely too bold in his Metaphors and coyning Words, out of which many times his Wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why *Horace* falls upon him so severely in those Verses:

Sed proavi nostri Plautinos & numeros, &
Laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque,
Ne dicam stolidè.

For *Horace* himself was cautious to obtrude a new Word on his Readers, and makes Custom and common Use the best Measure of receiving it into our Writings.

Multa

Multa renaſcentur quæ nunc cecidere, cadentque
Quæ nunc ſunt in honore vocabula, ſi volet uſus,
Quem penes, arbitrium eſt, & jus, & norma loquendi.

The not obſerving this Rule is that which the World has blam'd in our Satyriſt *Cleveland*; to expreſs a thing hard and unnaturally, is his new way of Elocution: 'Tis true, no Poet but may ſometimes uſe a *Catachreſis*; *Virgil* does it,

Miſtaque ridenti Colocaſia fundet Acantho,

In his Eclogue of *Pollio*; and in his ſeventh *Æneid*,

Mirantur & undæ,
Miratur nemus, inſuetum fulgentia longe
Scuta virûm fluvio, pictaſque innare carinas.

And *Ovid* once ſo modeſtly, that he aſks leave to do it,

Si verbo audacia detur,
Haud metuam ſummi dixiſſe Palatia cœli.

Calling the Court of *Jupiter* by the Name of *Auguſtus* his Palace, tho' in another place he is more bold, where he ſays, *Et longas viſent Capitolia pompas.* But to do this always, and never be able to write a Line without it, tho' it may be admir'd by ſome few Pedants, will not paſs upon thoſe who know that Wit is beſt convey'd to us in the moſt eaſy Language; and is moſt to be admir'd when a great Thought comes dreſt in words ſo commonly receiv'd, that it is underſtood by the meaneſt Apprehenſions, as the beſt Meat is the moſt eaſily digeſted. But we cannot read a Verſe of *Cleveland*'s without making a Face at it, as if every Word were a Pill to ſwallow: He gives us many times a hard Nut to break our Teeth, without a Kernel for our Pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his *Satyrs* and Doctor *Donn*'s, That the one gives us deep Thoughts in com-

mon Language, tho' rough Cadence; the other gives us common Thoughts in abstruse Words: 'Tis true, in some places his Wit is independent of his Words, as in that of the Rebel *Scot*:

Had Cain *been* Scot, *God would have chang'd his Doom;*
Not forc'd him wander, but confin'd him home.

Si sic omnia dixisset! This is Wit in all Languages: 'Tis like Mercury, never to be lost or kill'd: And so that other,

For Beauty, like White-Powder, makes no noise,
And yet the silent Hypocrite destroys.

You see the last Line is highly Metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle, that it does not shock us as we read it.

But, to return from whence I have digress'd, to the Consideration of the Ancients Writing and their Wit, (of which, by this time, you will grant us in some measure to be fit Judges,) Tho' I see many excellent Thoughts in *Seneca*; yet he, of them who had a Genius most proper for the Stage, was *Ovid*; he had a way of writing so fit to stir up a pleasing Admiration and Concernment, which are the Objects of a Tragedy, and to shew the various Movements of a Soul combating betwixt two different Passions, that had he liv'd in our Age, or in his own could have writ with our Advantages, no Man but must have yielded to him; and therefore I am confident the *Medea* is none of his; for though I esteem it for the Gravity and Sententiousness of it, which he himself concludes to be suitable to a Tragedy, *Omne genus scripti gravitate Tragœdia vincit*, yet it moves not my Soul enough to judge that he, who in the Epique way wrote things so near the *Drama*, as the Story of *Myrrha*, of *Caunus* and *Byblis*, and the rest, should stir up no more Concernment where he most endeavour'd it. The Master-piece of *Seneca* I hold to be that Scene in the *Troades*, where *Ulysses* is seeking for *Astyanax* to kill him;

him: There you see the Tenderness of a Mother, so represented in *Andromache*, that it raises Compassion to a high Degree in the Reader, and bears the neareſt Resemblance of any thing in the Tragedies of the Ancients, to the excellent Scenes of Passion in *Shakespear*, or in *Fletcher:* For Love Scenes you will find few among them, their Tragick Poets dealt not with that soft Passion, but with Lust, Cruelty, Revenge, Ambition, and those bloody Actions they produc'd; which were more capable of raising Horrour than Compassion in an Audience: Leaving Love untouch'd, whose Gentleness would have temper'd them, which is the most frequent of all the Passions, and which being the private Concernment of every Person, is sooth'd by viewing its own Image in a publick Entertainment.

Among their Comedies, we find a Scene or two of Tenderness, and that where you would least expect it, in *Plautus*; but to speak generally, their Lovers say little, when they see each other, but *anima mea, vita mita*; ζωὴ καὶ ψυχή, as the Women in *Juvenal*'s time us'd to cry out in the Fury of their Kindness: Any sudden gust of Passion (as an Ecstasy of Love in an unexpected Meeting) cannot better be expres'd than in a Word, and a Sigh, breaking one another. Nature is dumb on such Occasions, and to make her speak, would be to represent her unlike her self. But there are a thousand other Concernments of Lovers, as Jealousies, Complaints, Contrivances, and the like, where not to open their Minds at large to each other, were to be wanting to their own Love, and to the Expectation of the Audience; who watch the Movements of their Minds, as much as the Changes of their Fortunes. For the imagining of the first is properly the Work of a Poet, the latter he borrows from the Historian.

Eugenius was proceeding in that part of his Discourse, when *Crites* interrupted him. I see, said he, *Eugenius* and I are never like to have this Question decided betwixt us; for he maintains the Moderns have acquir'd a new Perfection in Writing, I can only grant they have altered the Mode of it. *Homer* describ'd his Heroes, Men

of great Appetites, Lovers of Beef broil'd upon the Coals, and good Fellows; contrary to the Practice of the *French* Romances, whose Heroes neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep for Love. *Virgil* makes *Æneas* a bold Avower of his own Virtues,

Sum pius Æneas famâ super æthera notus;

which in the civility of our Poets is the Character of a Fanfaron or Hector: For with us the Knight takes occasion to walk out, or sleep, to avoid the Vanity of telling his own Story, which the trusty Squire is ever to perform for him. So in their Love-Scenes, of which *Eugenius* spoke last, the Ancients were more hearty, we more talkative: They writ Love as it was then the Mode to make it, and I will grant this much to *Eugenius*, that perhaps one of their Poets, had he liv'd in our Age,

Si foret hoc nostrum fato delapsus in ævum,

(as *Horace* says of *Lucilius*) he had alter'd many things; not that they were not natural before, but that he might accommodate himself to the Age in which he liv'd; yet in the mean time we are not to conclude any thing rashly against those great Men, but preserve to them the Dignity of Masters, and give that Honour to their Memories, (*Quos Libitina sacravit*;) part of which we expect may be paid to us in future Times.

This Moderation of *Crites*, as it was pleasing to all the Company, so it put an end to that Dispute; which *Eugenius*, who seem'd to have the better of the Argument, would urge no farther: But *Lisideius*, after he had acknowledg'd himself of *Eugenius* his Opinion concerning the Ancients; yet told him he had forborn, till his Discourse were ended, to ask him, why he preferr'd the *English* Plays above those of other Nations? And whether we ought not to submit our Stage to the Exactness of our next Neighbours?

Tho', said *Eugenius*, I am at all times ready to defend the Honour of my Country against the *French*, and to main-

maintain, we are as well able to vanquish them with our Pens, as our Ancestors have been with their Swords; yet, if you please, added he, looking upon *Neander*, I will commit this Cause to my Friend's management; his Opinion of our Plays is the same with mine: And besides, there is no reason, that *Crites* and I, who have now left the Stage, should re enter so suddenly upon it; which is against the Laws of Comedy.

If the Question had been stated, replied *Lisideius*, who had writ best, the *French* or *English* forty Years ago, I should have been of your Opinion, and adjudged the Honour to our own Nation; but since that time, (said he, turning towards *Neander*) we have been so long together bad *Englishmen*, that we had no leisure to be good Poets; *Beaumont*, *Fletcher*, and *Johnson* (who were only capable of bringing us to that degree of Perfection which we have) were just then leaving the World; as if in an Age of so much Horror, Wit and those milder Studies of Humanity had no farther business among us. But the Muses, who ever follow Peace, went to plant in another Country; it was then that the great Cardinal of *Richlieu* began to take them into his Protection; and that, by his Encouragement, *Corneille* and some other *French-men* reform'd their Theatre, (which before was as much below ours, as it now surpasses it and the rest of *Europe*;) But because *Crites*, in his Discourse for the Ancients, has prevented me, by observing many Rules of the Stage, which the Moderns have borrow'd from them; I shall only, in short, demand of you, whether you are not convinc'd that of all Nations the *French* have best observ'd them? in the Unity of Time you find them so scrupulous, that it yet remains a Dispute among their Poets, whether the artificial Day of twelve Hours, more or less, be not meant by *Aristotle*, rather than the natural one of twenty four; and consequently, whether all Plays ought not to be reduc'd into that compass? This I can testify, that in all their *Drama*'s writ within these last twenty Years and upwards, I have not observ'd any that have extended the Time to thirty Hours. In the Unity of Place they are full as scrupulous; for many of their Criticks

limit it to that very Spot of Ground where the Play is suppos'd to begin; none of them exceed the compass of the same Town or City.

The Unity of Action in all their Plays is yet more conspicuous, for they do not burden them with Under-plots, as the *English* do; which is the reason why many Scenes of our Tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main Plot; and that we see two distinct Webs in a Play, like those in ill-wrought Stuffs; and two Actions, that is, two Plays carried on together, to the confounding of the Audience; who, before they are warm in their Concernments for one Part, are diverted to another; and by that means espouse the Interest of neither. From hence likewise it arises, that the one half of our Actors are not known to the other. They keep their distances as if they were *Mountagues* and *Capulets*, and seldom begin an Acquaintance 'till the last Scene of the Fifth Act, when they are all to meet upon the Stage. There is no Theatre in the World has any thing so absurd as the *English* Tragi-comedy, 'tis a *Drama* of our own Invention, and the Fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so; here a Course of Mirth, there another of Sadness and Passion, and a third of Honour and a Duel: Thus in two Hours and a half we run through all the Fits of *Bedlam*. The *French* afford you as much Variety on the same Day, but they do it not so unseasonably, or *mal à propos*, as we: Our Poets present you the Play and the Farce together; and our Stages still retain somewhat of the original civility of the Red Bull.

Atque ursum & pugiles media inter carmina poscunt.

The End of Tragedies or serious Plays, says *Aristotle*, is to beget Admiration, Compassion, or Concernment; but are not Mirth and Compassion things incompatible? And is it not evident, that the Poet must of necessity destroy the former by intermingling of the latter? That is, he must ruin the sole End and Object of his Tragedy to introduce somewhat that is forced into it, and is not of the body of it: Would you not think that Physician mad,

mad, who having prescribed a Purge, should immediately order you to take Restringents?

But to leave our Plays, and return to theirs, I have noted one great Advantage they have had in the Plotting of their Tragedies; that is, they are always grounded upon some known History; according to that of *Horace*, *Ex noto fictum carmen sequar*; and in that they have so imitated the Ancients, that they have surpass'd them. For the Ancients, as was observ'd before, took for the foundation of their Plays some Poetical Fiction, such as under that consideration could move but little concernment in the Audience; because they already knew the Event of it. But the *French* goes farther:

Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.

He so interweaves Truth with probable Fiction, that he puts a pleasing Fallacy upon us, mends the intrigues of Fate, and dispenses with the severity of History, to reward the Virtue which has been render'd to us there unfortunate. Sometimes the Story has left the Success so doubtful, that the Writer is free, by the privilege of a Poet, to take that which of two or more Relations will best suit with his Design: As for Example, In the death of *Cyrus*, whom *Justin* and some others report to have perish'd in the *Scythian* War, but *Xenophon* affirms to have died in his Bed of extream old Age. Nay more, when the Event is past dispute, even then we are willing to be deceiv'd, and the Poet, if he contrives it with appearance of Truth, has all the Audience of his Party; at least during the time his Play is acting: So naturally we are kind to Virtue, when our own Interest is not in Question, that we take it up as the general Concernment of Mankind. On the other side, if you consider the Historical Plays of *Shakespear*, they are rather so many Chronicles of Kings, or the Business many times of thirty or forty Years, crampt into a Representation of two Hours and a half, which is not to imitate or paint Nature, but rather to draw her in miniature, to take

her in little; to look upon her through the wrong End of a Perſpective, and receive her Images not only much leſs, but infinitely more imperfect than the Life: This, inſtead of making a Play delightful, renders it ridiculous.

Quodcunque oſtendis mihi ſic, incredulus odi.

For the Spirit of Man cannot be ſatisfied but with Truth, or at leaſt Veriſimility; and a Poem is to contain, if not τὰ ἔτυμα, yet ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, as one of the *Greek* Poets has expreſs'd it.

Another thing in which the *French* differ from us and from the *Spaniards*, is, that they do not embaraſs or cumber themſelves with too much Plot: They only repreſent ſo much of a Story as will conſtitute one whole and great Action ſufficient for a Play; we, who undertake more, do but multiply Adventures; which not being produc'd from one another, as Effects from Cauſes, but barely following, conſtitute many Actions in the *Drama*, and conſequently make it many Plays.

But by purſuing cloſely one Argument, which is not cloy'd with many Turns, the *French* have gain'd more liberty for Verſe, in which they write: They have leiſure to dwell on a Subject which deſerves it; and to repreſent the Paſſions (which we have acknowledg'd to be the Poet's work) without being hurried from one thing to another, as we are in the Plays of *Calderon*, which we have ſeen lately upon our Theaters, under the name of *Spaniſh* Plots. I have taken notice but of one Tragedy of ours, whoſe Plot has that uniformity and unity of Deſign in it, which I have commended in the *French*; and that is *Rollo*, or rather, under the name of *Rollo*, The Story of *Baſſianus* and *Geta* in *Herodian*; there indeed the Plot is neither large nor intricate, but juſt enough to fill the Minds of the Audience, not to cloy them. Beſides, you ſee it founded upon the truth of Hiſtory, only the time of the Action is not reduceable to the ſtrictneſs of the Rules; and you ſee in ſome places a little Farce ming'ed, which is below the dignity of the other Parts; and in this all our Poets are extreamly peccant, even *Ben Johnſon*

Johnson himself in *Sejanus* and *Catiline* has given us this Oleo of a Play, this unnatural Mixture of Comedy and Tragedy, which to me sounds just as ridiculously as the History of *David* with the merry Humours of *Goliah*. In *Sejanus* you may take notice of the Scene betwixt *Livia* and the Physician, which is a pleasant Satyr upon the artificial helps of Beauty: In *Catiline* you may see the Parliament of Women; the little Envies of them to one another; and all that passes betwixt *Curio* and *Fulvia*: Scenes admirable in their kind, but of an ill mingle with the rest.

But I return again to the *French* Writers; who, as I have said, do not burden themselves too much with Plot, which has been reproach'd to them by an *ingenious Person* of our Nation as a Fault; for he says they commonly make but one Person considerable in a Play; they dwell on him, and his concernments, while the rest of the Persons are only subservient to set him off. If he intends this by it, that there is one Person in the Play who is of greater Dignity than the rest, he must tax, not only theirs, but those of the Ancients, and, which he would be loth to do, the best of ours, for 'tis impossible but that one Person must be more conspicuous in it than any other, and consequently the greatest share in the Action must devolve on him. We see it so in the management of all Affairs: even in the most equal Aristocracy, the balance cannot be so justly pois'd, but some one will be Superior to the rest; either in Parts, Fortune, Interest, or the Consideration of some glorious Exploit; which will reduce the greatest part of Business into his Hands.

But, if he would have us to imagine, that in exalting one Character the rest of them are neglected, and that all of them have not some share or other in the Action of the Play, I desire him to produce any of *Corneille*'s Tragedies, wherein every Person (like so many Servants in a well-govern'd Family) has not some Employment, and who is not necessary to the carrying on of the Plot, or at least to your understanding it.

There are indeed some protatick Persons in the Ancients, whom they make use of in their Plays, either to hear, or give the Relation: But the *French* avoid this with great Address, making their Narrations only to, or by such, who are some way interested in the main Design. And now I am speaking of Relations, I cannot take a fitter Opportunity to add this in favour of the *French*, that they often use them with better judgment and more *à propos* than the *English* do. Not that I commend Narrations in general, but there are two sorts of them: one of those things which are antecedent to the Play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us; but 'tis a Fault to chuse such Subjects for the Stage as will force us on that Rock; because we see they are seldom listned to by the Audience, and that is many times the ruin of the Play: For, being once let pass without Attention, the Audience can never recover themselves to understand the Plot; and indeed it is somewhat unreasonable, that they should be put to so much trouble, as, that to comprehend what passes in their sight, they must have recourse to what was done, perhaps, ten or twenty Years ago.

But there is another sort of Relations, that is, of things happening in the Action of the Play, and suppos'd to be done behind the Scenes: And this is many times both convenient and beautiful: For, by it the *French* avoid the Tumult, to which we are subject in *England*, by representing Duels, Battels, and the like; which renders our Stage too like the Theaters where they fight Prizes. For what is more ridiculous than to represent an Army with a Drum and five Men behind it; all which, the Heroe of the other side is to drive in before him? or to see a Duel fought, and one slain with two or three thrusts of the Foils, which we know are so blunted, that we might give a Man an Hour to kill another in good earnest with them?

I have observ'd, that in all our Tragedies the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the most comick Part of the whole Play. All *Passions* may be lively represented on the Stage, if to the well-writing

writing of them the Actor supplies a good commanded Voice, and Limbs that move easily, and without stiffness; but there are many *Actions* which can never be imitated to a just height: Dying especially is a thing which none but a *Roman* Gladiator could naturally perform on the Stage, when he did not imitate or represent, but do it; and therefore it is better to omit the Representation of it.

The Words of a good Writer which describe it lively, will make a deeper Impression of Belief in us, than all the Actor can insinuate into us, when he seems to fall dead before us; as a Poet in the Description of a beautiful Garden, or a Meadow, will please our Imagination more than the place it self can please our sight. When we see Death represented, we are convinc'd it is but Fiction; but when we hear it related, our Eyes (the strongest Witnesses) are wanting, which might have undeceiv'd us; and we are all willing to favour the slight when the Poet does not too grosly impose on us. They therefore who imagine these Relations would make no Concernment in the Audience, are deceiv'd, by confounding them with the other, which are of things antecedent to the Play; those are made often in cold Blood (as I may say) to the Audience; but these are warm'd with our Concernments, which were before awaken'd in the Play. What the Philosophers say of Motion, that, when it is once begun, it continues of it self, and will do so to Eternity without some stop put to it, is clearly true on this Occasion; the Soul being already mov'd with the Characters and Fortunes of those imaginary Persons, continues going of its own accord, and we are no more weary to hear what becomes of them when they are not on the Stage, than we are to listen to the News of an absent Mistress. But it is objected, That if one part of the Play may be related, then why not all? I answer, Some parts of the Action are more fit to be represented, some to be related. *Corneille* says judiciously, that the Poet is not oblig'd to expose to View all particular Actions which conduce to the principal: He ought to select such of them to be seen, which will appear with the greatest Beauty,

Beauty, either by the magnificence of the Show, or the vehemence of Paſſions which they produce, or ſome other Charm which they have in them, and let the reſt arrive to the Audience by Narration. 'Tis a great miſtake in us to believe the *French* preſent no part of the Action on the Stage: Every alteration or croſſing of a Deſign, every new-ſprung Paſſion, and turn of it, is a part of the Action, and much the nobleſt, except we conceive nothing to be Action till the Players come to Blows; as if the painting of the Heroe's Mind were not more properly the Poet's Work, than the ſtrength of his Body. Nor does this any thing contradict the Opinion of *Horace*, where he tells us,

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus. ——

For he ſays immediately after,

——— *Non tamen intus*
Digna geri promes in ſcenam, multaque tolles
Ex oculis, quæ mox narret facundia præſens.

Among which many he recounts ſome,

Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,
Aut in avem Progne mutetur, Cadmus in anguem, &c.

That is, thoſe Actions which by reaſon of their Cruelty will cauſe Averſion in us, or by reaſon of their Impoſſibility, Unbelief, ought either wholly to be avoided by a Poet, or only deliver'd by Narration. To which we may have leave to add ſuch as to avoid Tumult, (as was before hinted) or to reduce the Plot into a more reaſonable compaſs of Time, or for defect of Beauty in them, are rather to be related than preſented to the Eye. Examples of all theſe kinds are frequent, not only among all the Ancients, but in the beſt receiv'd of our *Engliſh* Poets. We find *Ben Johnſon* uſing them in his *Magnetick Lady*, where one comes out from Dinner, and relates

relates the Quarrels and Disorders of it to save the undecent appearance of them on the Stage, and to abbreviate the Story: And this in express imitation of *Terence*, who had done the same before him in his *Eunuch*, where *Pythias* makes the like Relation of what had happen'd within at the Soldier's Entertainment. The Relation, likewise, of *Sejanus*'s Death, and the Prodigies before it, are remarkable; the one of which was hid from sight to avoid the Horror and Tumult of the Representation; the other to shun the introducing of things impossible to be believ'd. In that excellent Play, *The King and no King*, *Fletcher* goes yet farther; for the whole unravelling of the Plot is done by Narration in the fifth Act, after the manner of the Ancients; and it moves great Concernment in the Audience, tho' it be only a Relation of what was done many Years before the Play. I could multiply other Instances, but these are sufficient to prove, that there is no Error in chusing a Subject which requires this sort of Narrations; in the ill Management of them, there may.

But I find I have been too long in this Discourse, since the *French* have many other Excellencies not common to us; as that you never see any of their Plays end with a Conversion, or simple change of Will, which is the ordinary way which our Poets use to end theirs. It shews little Art in the conclusion of a Dramatick Poem, when they who have hinder'd the Felicity during the four Acts, desist from it in the Fifth, without some powerful Cause to take them off their Design; and tho' I deny not but such Reasons may be found, yet it is a Path that is cautiously to be trod, and the Poet is to be sure he convinces the Audience, that the Motive is strong enough. As for Example, the Conversion of the Usurer in *The Scornful Lady*, seems to me a little forc'd; for being an Usurer, which implies a lover of Money to the highest degree of Covetousness, (and such the Poet has represented him) the Account he gives for the sudden Change is, that he has been dup'd by the wild young Fellow, which in reason might render him more wary another time, and make him punish himself with harder Fare

Fare and coarser Cloaths to get up again what he had lost: But that he should look on it as a Judgment, and so repent, we may expect to hear in a Sermon, but I should never indure it in a Play.

I pass by this; neither will I insist on the Care they take, that no Person after his first Entrance shall ever appear, but the Business which brings him upon the Stage shall be evident: Which Rule if observ'd, must needs render all the Events in the Play more natural: For there you see the Probability of every Accident, in the Cause that produc'd it; and that which appears Chance in the Play, will seem so reasonable to you, that you will there find it almost necessary; so that in the Exit of the Actor you have a clear Account of his Purpose and Design in the next Entrance: (tho', if the Scene be well wrought, the Event will commonly deceive you) for there is nothing so absurd, says *Corneille*, as for an Actor to leave the Stage, only because he has no more to say.

I should now speak of the Beauty of their Rhyme, and the just reason I have to prefer that way of writing in Tragedies before ours in Blank-Verse; but because it is partly receiv'd by us, and therefore not altogether peculiar to them, I will say no more of it in relation to their Plays. For our own, I doubt not but it will exceedingly beautify them, and I can see but one Reason why it should not generally obtain, that is, because our Poets write so ill in it. This indeed may prove a more prevailing Argument than all others which are us'd to destroy it, and therefore I am only troubled when great and judicious Poets, and those who are acknowledg'd such, have writ or spoke against it; as for others, they are to be answer'd by that one Sentence of an ancient Author.

Sed ut primo ad consequendos eos quos priores ducimus accendimur, ita ubi aut præteriri, aut æquari eos posse desperavimus, studium cum spe senescit: quod scilicet, assequi non potest, sequi desinit; præteritoque eo in quo eminere non possumus, aliquid in quo nitamur conquirimus.

Lisideius concluded in this manner; and *Neander* after a little pause thus answer'd him.

I shall grant *Lisideius*, without much dispute, a great part of what he has urg'd against us; for I acknowledge, that the *French* contrive their Plots more regularly, and observe the Laws of Comedy, and Decorum of the Stage (to speak generally) with more Exactness than the *English*. Farther, I deny not but he has tax'd us justly in some Irregularities of ours which he has mention'd; yet, after all, I am of Opinion, that neither our Faults nor their Virtues are considerable enough to place them above us.

But the lively Imitation of Nature being in the Definition of a Play, those which best fulfil that Law, ought to be esteem'd Superior to the others. 'Tis true, those Beauties of the *French* Poesy are such as will raise Perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: They are indeed the Beauties of a Statue, but not of a Man, because not animated with the Soul of Poesy, which is Imitation of Humour and Passions: And this *Lisideius* himself, or any other, however byas'd to their Party, cannot but acknowledge, if he will either compare the Humours of our Comedies, or the Characters of our serious Plays, with theirs. He who will look upon theirs which have been written 'till these last ten Years or thereabouts, will find it an hard matter to pick out two or three passable Humours amongst them. *Corneille* himself, their Arch-Poet, what has he produc'd, except *The Liar*, and you know how it was cry'd up in *France*; but when it came upon the *English* Stage, though well translated, and that part of *Dorant* acted with so much Advantage as I am confident it never receiv'd in its own Country, the most favourable to it would not put it in Competition with many of *Fletcher*'s or *Ben Johnson*'s. In the rest of *Corneille*'s Comedies you have little Humour; he tells you himself his way is first to shew two Lovers in good Intelligence with each other; in the working up of the Play, to embroil them by some Mistake, and in the latter end to clear it, and reconcile them.

But of late Years *Moliere*, the younger *Corneille*, *Quinault*, and some others, have been imitating afar off the quick

quick Turns and Graces of the *English* Stage. They have mix'd their serious Plays with Mirth, like our Tragi-Comedies, since the Death of Cardinal *Richelieu*, which *Lisideius*, and many others, not observing, have commended that in them for a Virtue, which they themselves no longer practise. Most of their new Plays are, like some of ours, derived from the *Spanish* Novels. There is scarce one of them without a Veil, and a trusty *Diego*, who drolls much after the rate of the *Adventures*. But their Humours, if I may grace them with that name, are so thin sown, that never above one of them comes up in any Play: I dare take upon me to find more variety of them in some one Play of *Ben Johnson*'s, than in all theirs together: As he who has seen the *Alchymist*, the *Silent Woman*, or *Bartholomew-Fair*, cannot but acknowledge with me.

I grant the *French* have performed what was possible on the ground-work of the *Spanish* Plays; what was pleasant before, they have made regular; but there is not above one good Play to be writ on all those Plots; they are too much alike to please often, which we need not the Experience of our own Stage to justifie. As for their new Way of mingling Mirth with serious Plot, I do not, with *Lisideius*, condemn the thing, though I cannot approve their manner of doing it: He tells us, we cannot so speedily recollect our selves after a Scene of great Passion and Concernment, as to pass to another of Mirth and Humour, and to enjoy it with any relish: But why should he imagine the Soul of Man more heavy than his Senses? Does not the Eye pass from an unpleasant Object to a pleasant, in a much shorter time than is required to this? And does not the Unpleasantness of the first commend the Beauty of the latter? The old Rule of Logick, might have convinc'd him, That Contraries when plac'd near, set off each other. A continued Gravity keeps the Spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait in a Journey, that we may go on with greater ease. A Scene of Mirth mix'd with Tragedy, has the same effect upon us which our Musick has betwixt the Acts, which we find a Relief to

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us from the best Plots and Language of the Stage, if the Discourses have been long. I must therefore have stronger Arguments ere I am convinc'd, that Compassion and Mirth in the same Subject destroy each other; and in the mean time, cannot but conclude, to the Honour of our Nation, that we have invented, increas'd, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the Stage, than was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any Nation, which is Tragi-Comedy.

And this leads me to wonder why *Lisideius* and many others should cry up the Barrenness of the *French* Plots, above the Variety and Copiousness of the *English*. Their Plots are single, they carry on one Design, which is push'd forward by all the Actors, every Scene in the Play contributing and moving towards it: Our Plays, besides the main Design, have Under-Plots, or By-Concernments, or less considerable Persons, and Intrigues, which are carried on with the Motion of the main Plot: As they say the Orb of the fix'd Stars, and those of the Planets, though they have Motions of their own, are whirl'd about by the Motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contain'd: That Similitude expresses much of the *English* Stage: For if contrary Motions may be found in Nature to agree; if a Planet can go East and West at the same time; one way by Virtue of his own Motion, the other by the force of the first Mover; it will not be difficult to imagine how the Under-Plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great Design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

Eugenius has already shewn us, from the Confession of the *French* Poets, that the Unity of Action is sufficiently preserv'd, if all the imperfect Actions of the Play are conducing to the main Design: But when those petty Intrigues of a Play are so ill order'd, that they have no coherence with the other, I must grant that *Lisideius* has reason to tax that want of due Connexion; for Co-ordination in a Play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a State. In the mean time, he must acknowledge our Variety, if well order'd, will afford a greater Pleasure to the Audience.

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As for his other Argument, that by pursuing one single Theme they gain an Advantage to express and work up the Passions, I wish any Example he could bring from them would make it good: for I confess their Verses are to me the coldest I have ever read: Neither indeed is it possible for them, in the way they take, so to express Passion, as that the Effects of it should appear in the Concernment of an Audience, their Speeches being so many Declamations, which tire us with the Length; so that instead of perswading us to grieve for their imaginary Heroes, we are concern'd for our own trouble, as we are in tedious Visits of bad Company; we are in pain till they are gone. When the *French* Stage came to be reform'd by Cardinal *Richelieu*, those long Harangues were introduc'd, to comply with the Gravity of a Churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*, they are not so properly to be called Plays, as long Discourses of Reason of State: And *Polieucte* in Matters of Religion is as solemn as the long Stops upon our Organs. Since that time it is grown into a Custom, and their Actors speak by the Hour-glass, like our Parsons; nay, they account it the Grace of their Parts, and think themselves disparaged by the Poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a Play entertain the Audience with a Speech of an hundred Lines. I deny not but this may suit well enough with the *French*; for as we, who are a more sullen People, come to be diverted at our Plays; so they, who are of an airy and gay Temper, come hither to make themselves more serious: And this I conceive to be one reason, why Comedies are more pleasing to us, and Tragedies to them. But to speak generally, it cannot be deny'd, that short Speeches and Replies are more apt to move the Passions, and beget Concernment in us, than the other: For it is unnatural for any one in a Gust of Passion, to speak long together; or for another, in the same Condition, to suffer him without Interruption. Grief and Passion are like Floods rais'd in little Brooks by a sudden Rain; they are quickly up, and if the Concernment be pour'd unexpectedly in upon us, it overflows us: But a long sober Shower gives them

them leiſure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary Current. As for Comedy, Repartee is one of its chiefeſt Graces; the greateſt Pleaſure of the Audience is a Chace of Wit kept up on both ſides, and ſwiftly manag'd. And this our Fore-fathers, if not we, have had in *Fletcher*'s Plays, to a much higher Degree of Perfection, than the *French* Poets can, reaſonably, hope to reach.

There is another part of *Liſideius* his Diſcourſe, in which he has rather excus'd our Neighbours than commended them; that is, for aiming only to make one Perſon conſiderable in their Plays. 'Tis very true what he has urged, That one Character in all Plays, even without the Poet's Care, will have Advantage of all the others; and that the Deſign of the whole *Drama* will chiefly depend upon it. But this hinders not that there may be more ſhining Characters in the Play; many Perſons of a ſecond Magnitude, nay, ſome ſo very near, ſo almoſt equal to the firſt, that Greatneſs may be oppos'd to Greatneſs, and all the Perſons be made conſiderable, not only by their Quality, but their Action. 'Tis evident, that the more the Perſons are, the greater will be the Variety of the Plot. If then the Parts are managed ſo regularly, that the Beauty of the whole be kept intire, and that the Variety become not a perplex'd and confus'd Maſs of Accidents, you will find it infinitely pleaſing to be led in a Labyrinth of Deſign, where you ſee ſome of your way before you, yet diſcern not the End till you arrive at it. And that all this is practicable, I can produce for Examples many of our *Engliſh* Plays: As the *Maids Tragedy*, the *Alchymiſt*, the *Silent Woman*; I was going to have named the *Fox*, but that the Unity of Deſign ſeems not exactly obſerv'd in it; for there appear two Actions in the Play; the firſt naturally ending with the fourth Act; the ſecond forc'd from it in the fifth: Which yet is the leſs to be condemn'd in him, becauſe the Diſguiſe of *Volpone*, though it ſuited not with his Character as a crafty or covetous Perſon, agreed well enough with that of a Voluptuary: And by it the Poet gain'd the End at which he aim'd, the Puniſhment

niſhment of Vice, and the Reward of Virtue, both which that Diſguiſe produc'd. So that to judge equally of it, it was an excellent fifth Act, but not ſo naturally proceeding from the former.

But to leave this, and paſs to the latter part of *Liſideius* his Diſcourſe, which concerns Relations, I muſt acknowledge with him, that the *French* have reaſon to hide that part of the Action which would occaſion too much Tumult on the Stage, and to chuſe rather to have it made known by Narration to the Audience. Farther, I think it very convenient, for the Reaſons he has given, that all incredible Actions were remov'd; but, whether Cuſtom has ſo inſinuated it ſelf into our Country-men, or Nature has ſo form'd them to Fierceneſs, I know not; but they will ſcarcely ſuffer Combats and other Objects of Horror to be taken from them. And indeed, the Indecency of Tumults is all which can be objected againſt fighting: For why may not our Imagination as well ſuffer it ſelf to be deluded with the Probability of it, as with any other thing in the Play? For my Part, I can with as great eaſe perſuade my ſelf, that the Blows are given in good earneſt, as I can, that they who ſtrike them are Kings or Princes, or thoſe Perſons which they repreſent. For Objects of Incredibility, I would be ſatisfied from *Liſideius*, whether we have any ſo remov'd from all appearance of Truth, as are thoſe of *Corneille*'s *Andromede?* A Play which has been frequented the moſt of any he has writ. If the *Perſeus*, or the Son of an Heathen God, the *Pegaſus* and the Monſter, were not capable to choak a ſtrong Belief, let him blame any Repreſentation of ours hereafter. Thoſe indeed were Objects of Delight; yet the Reaſon is the ſame as to the Probability: For he makes it not a Balette or Maſque, but a Play, which is to reſemble Truth. But for Death, that it ought not to be repreſented, I have, beſides the Arguments alledged by *Liſideius*, the Authority of *Ben Johnſon*, who has forborn it in his Tragedies; for both the Death of *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are related: Though in the latter I cannot but obſerve one Irregularity of that great Poet: He has remov'd the Scene in the ſame Act, from

from *Rome* to *Catiline*'s Army, and from thence again to *Rome*; and besides, has allow'd a very inconsiderable time after *Catiline*'s Speech, for the striking of the Battel, and the return of *Petreius*, who is to relate the event of it to the Senate: Which I should not animadvert on him, who was otherwise a painful Observer of τὸ πρεπὸν, or the *decorum* of the Stage, if he had not us'd extream Severity in his Judgment on the incomparable *Shakespear* for the same fault. To conclude on this Subject of Relations, if we are to be blam'd for shewing too much of the Action, the *French* are as faulty for discovering too little of it: A Mean betwixt both should be observed by every judicious Writer, so as the Audience may neither be left unsatisfied by not seeing what is beautiful, or shock'd by beholding what is either incredible or indecent. I hope I have already prov'd in this Discourse, that though we are not altogether so punctual as the *French*, in observing the Laws of Comedy; yet our Errors are so few, and little, and those things wherein we excel them so considerable, that we ought of right to be preferr'd before them. But what will *Lisideius* say, if they themselves acknowledge they are too strictly bounded by those Laws, for breaking which he has blam'd the *English?* I will alledge *Corneille*'s Words, as I find them in the end of his Discourse of the three Unities; *Il est facile aux speculatifs d'estre severes*, &c. "'Tis easy for speculative Persons to judge severely; "but if they would produce to publick View ten or "twelve Pieces of this Nature, they would perhaps give "more Latitude to the Rules than I have done, when "by Experience they had known how much we are "limited and constrain'd by them, and how many Beau-"ties of the Stage they banish'd from it." To illustrate a little what he has said: By their servile Observations of the Unities of time and place, and integrity of Scenes, they have brought on themselves that dearth of Plot, and narrowness of Imagination, which may be observed in all their Plays. How many beautiful Accidents might naturally happen in two or three Days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the Compass of twenty four

four Hours? There is time to be allowed also for maturity of Design, which amongst great and prudent Persons, such as are often represented in Tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning. Farther by tying themselves strictly to the Unity of Place, and unbroken Scenes, they are forc'd many times to omit some Beauties which cannot be shewn where the Act began; but might, if the Scene were interrupted, and the Stage clear'd for the Persons to enter in another place; and therefore the *French* Poets are often forc'd upon Absurdities: For if the Act begins in a Chamber, all the Persons in the Play must have some Business or other to come thither, or else they are not to be shewn that Act, and sometimes their Characters are very unfitting to appear there: As Suppose it were the King's Bed-chamber, yet the meanest Man in the Tragedy must come and dispatch his Business there, rather than in the Lobby or Court-yard, (which is fitter for him) for fear the Stage should be clear'd, and the Scenes broken. Many times they fall by it into a greater Inconvenience: for they keep their Scenes unbroken, and yet change the Place; as in one of their newest Plays, where the Act begins in the Street. There a Gentleman is to meet his Friend; he sees him with his Man, coming out from his Father's House; they talk together, and the first goes out: The Second who is a Lover, has made an appointment with his Mistress; she appears at the Window, and then we are to imagine the Scene lies under it. This Gentleman is call'd away, and leaves his Servant with his Mistress: Presently her Father is heard from within; the young Lady is afraid the Serving-man should be discover'd, and thrusts him into a place of safety, which is suppos'd to be her Closet. After this, the Father enters to the Daughter, and now the Scene is in a House: For he is seeking from one Room to another for this poor *Philipin*, or *French Diego*, who is heard from within, drolling and breaking many a miserable Conceit on the subject of his sad Condition. In this ridiculous Manner the Play goes forward, the Stage being never empty all the while: so that the Street,

Street, the Window, the two Houſes, and the Cloſet, are made to walk about, and the Perſons to ſtand ſtill. Now what I beſeech you is more eaſy than to write a regular *French* Play, or more difficult than to write an irregular *Engliſh* one, like thoſe of *Fletcher*, or of *Shakeſpear?*

If they content themſelves, as *Corneille* did, with ſome flat deſign, which like an ill Riddle, is found out ere it be half propos'd; ſuch Plots we can make every way regular as eaſily as they: But whene'er they endeavour to riſe to any quick turns and counter-turns of Plot, as ſome of them have attempted, ſince *Corneille*'s Plays have been leſs in vogue, you ſee they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more ſpeciouſly. Hence the reaſon is perſpicuous, why no *French* Plays, when tranſlated, have, or ever can ſucceed on the *Engliſh* Stage. For, if you conſider the Plots, our own are fuller of Variety; if the Writing, ours are more quick and fuller of ſpirit: and therefore 'tis a ſtrange miſtake in thoſe who decry the way of writing Plays in Verſe, as if the *Engliſh* therein imitated the *French*. We have borrowed nothing from them; our Plots are weav'd in *Engliſh* Looms: we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatneſs of Characters which are deriv'd to us from *Shakeſpear* and *Fletcher*: the copiouſneſs and well-knitting of the Intriegues we have from *Johnſon*; and for the Verſe it ſelf we have *Engliſh* Precedents of elder date than any of *Corneille*'s Plays: (not to name our old Comedies before *Shakeſpear*, which were all writ in verſe of ſix feet, of *Alexandrines*, ſuch as the *French* now uſes) I can ſhew in *Shakeſpear*, many Scenes of Rhyme together, and the like in *Ben Johnſon*'s Tragedies: In *Catiline* and *Sejanus* ſometimes thirty or forty lines; I mean, beſides the Chorus, or the Monologues, which by the way, ſhew'd *Ben* no Enemy to this way of Writing, eſpecially if you read his *Sad Shepherd*, which goes ſometimes on Rhyme, ſometimes on blank Verſe, like an Horſe who eaſes himſelf on Trot and Amble. You find him likewiſe commending *Fletcher*'s Paſtoral of the *Faithful Shepherdeſs*; which is for the moſt part Rhyme, though not

not refin'd to that Purity to which it hath since been brought: And these Examples are enough to clear us from a servile Imitation of the *French*.

But to return whence I have digress'd, I dare boldly affirm these two things of the *English Drama*: First, That we have many Plays of ours as regular as any of theirs; and which, besides, have more variety of Plot and Characters: And secondly, that in most of the irregular Plays of *Shakespear* or *Fletcher*, (for *Ben Johnson*'s are for the most part regular) there is a more masculine Fancy, and greater Spirit in the writing, than there is in any of the *French*. I could produce even in *Shakespear*'s and *Fletcher*'s Works, some Plays which are almost exactly form'd; as *The Merry Wives of* Windsor, and *The Scornful Lady*: But, because (generally speaking) *Shakespear*, who writ first, did not perfectly observe the Laws of Comedy, and *Fletcher*, who came nearer to Perfection, yet through Carelessness made many Faults; I will take the Pattern of a perfect Play from *Ben Johnson*, who was a careful and learned Observer of the Dramatick Laws, and from all his Comedies I shall select *The Silent Woman*: of which I will make a short Examen, according to those Rules which the *French* observe.

As *Neander* was beginning to examine *The Silent Woman*; *Eugenius*, earnestly regarding him, I beseech you, *Neander*, said he, gratify the Company, and me in particular so far as, before you speak of the Play, to give us a Character of the Author; and tell us frankly your Opinion, whether you do not think all Writers, both *French* and *English*, ought to give place to him?

I fear, replied *Neander*, That in obeying your Commands, I shall draw some Envy on my self. Besides, in performing them, it will be first necessary to speak somewhat of *Shakespear* and *Fletcher*, his Rivals in Poesy; and one of them, in my Opinion, at least his Equal, perhaps his Superior.

To begin then with *Shakespear*: he was the Man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive Soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously,

laboriously, but luckily: When he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted Learning, give him the greater Commendation: he was naturally learn'd: he needed not the Spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot say, he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of Mankind. He is many times flat, and insipid; his Comick Wit degenerating into Clenches, his Serious swelling into Bombast. But he is always great, when some great Occasion is presented to him: No Man can say, he ever had a fit Subject for his Wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of Poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter Viburna Cupressi.

The Consideration of this made Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton* say, That there was no Subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in *Shakespear*; and however others are now generally preferr'd before him, yet the Age wherein he liv'd, which had Contemporaries with him, *Fletcher* and *Johnson*, never equall'd them to him in their Esteem: And in the last King's Court, when *Ben*'s Reptation was at highest, Sir *John Suckling*, and with him the greater Part of the Courtiers, set our *Shakespear* far above him.

Beaumont and *Fletcher*, of whom I am next to speak, had, with the Advantage of *Shakespear's* Wit, which was their Precedent, great natural Gifts, improv'd by Study. *Beaumont* especially being so accurate a Judge of Plays, that *Ben Johnson* while he liv'd submitted all his Writings to his Censure, and, 'tis thought, us'd his Judgment in correcting, if not contriving all his Plots. What value he had for him appears by the Verses he writ to him; and therefore I need speak no farther of it. The first Play that brought *Fletcher* and him in Esteem, was their *Philaster*; for before that, they had written two or three very unsuccessfully: As the like is reported of *Ben Johnson*, before he writ *Every Man in his Humour*.

Their Plots were generally more regular than *Shakespear*'s, especially those which were made before *Beaumont*'s Death; and they understood and imitated the Conversation of Gentlemen much better; whose wild Debaucheries, and Quickness of Wit in Repartees, no Poet before them could paint as they have done. Humour, which *Ben Johnson* deriv'd from particular Persons, they made it not their Business to describe: They represented all the Passions very lively, but above all, Love. I am apt to believe the *English* Language in them arriv'd to its highest Perfection; what Words have since been taken in, are rather Superfluous than Ornamental. Their Plays are now the most pleasant and frequent Entertainments of the Stage; two of theirs being acted through the Year for one of *Shakespear*'s or *Johnson*'s: The Reason is, because there is a certain Gayety in their Comedies, and Pathos in their more serious Plays, which suits generally with all Mens Humours. *Shakespear*'s Language is likewise a little obsolete, and *Ben Johnson*'s Wit comes short of theirs.

As for *Johnson*, to whose Character I am now arrived, if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last Plays were but his Dotages) I think him the most learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a most severe Judge of himself as well as others. One cannot say he wanted Wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his Works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour also in some measure, we had before him; but something of Art was wanting to the *Drama*, 'till he came. He manag'd his Strength to more advantage than any who preceded him, You seldom find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Passions; his Genius was too sullen and Saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such an Height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent Mechanick People. He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both *Greek* and *Latin*, and he borrow'd boldly from them: There is scarce a Poet or Histo-

Historian among the *Roman* Authors of those Times, whom he has not translated in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. But he has done his Robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authors like a Monarch, and what would be Theft in other Poets, is only Victory in him. With the Spoils of these Writers he so represents old *Rome* to us in its Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had seen less of it than in him. If there was any Fault in his Language, 'twas, that he weav'd it too closely and laboriously, in his Comedies especially: Perhaps too, he did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the Words which he translated almost as much *Latin* as he found them: Wherein though he learnedly followed their Language, he did not enough comply with the Idiom of ours. If I would compare him with *Shakespear*, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakespear* the greater Wit. *Shakespear* was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; *Johnson* was the *Virgil*, the Pattern of elaborate Writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakespear*. To conclude of him, as he has given us the most correct Plays, so in the Precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage, as any wherewith the *French* can furnish us.

Having thus spoken of the Author, I proceed to the Examination of his Comedy, *The Silent Woman*.

Examen of the Silent Woman.

To begin first with the Length of the Action; it is so far from exceeding the Compass of a Natural Day, that it takes not up an Artificial one. 'Tis all included in the Limits of three Hours and an half, which is no more than is required for the Presentment on the Stage. A Beauty perhaps not much observ'd; if it had, we should not have look'd on the *Spanish* Translation of *Five Hours* with so much Wonder. The Scene of it is laid in *London*; the Latitude of Place is almost as little as you can

imagine: For it lies all within the Compaſs of two Houſes, and after the firſt Act, in one. The Continuity of Scenes is obſerv'd more than in any of our Plays, except his own *Fox* and *Alchymiſt*. They are not broken above twice, or thrice at moſt, in the whole Comedy; and in the two beſt of *Corneille*'s Plays, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once. The Action of the Play is intirely one; the End or Aim of which is the ſettling *Moroſe*'s Eſtate on *Dauphine*. The Intrigue of it is the greateſt and moſt noble of any pure unmix'd Comedy in any Language: You ſee it in many Perſons of various Characters and Humours, and all delightful: As firſt, *Moroſe*, or an old Man, to whom all Noiſe, but his own Talking, is offenſive. Some, who would be thought Criticks, ſay this Humour of his is forc'd: But to remove that Objection, we may conſider him, firſt to be naturally of a delicate Hearing, as many are to whom all ſharp Sounds are unpleaſant; and ſecondly, we may attribute much of it to the Peeviſhneſs of his Age, or the wayward Authority of an old Man in his own Houſe, where he may make himſelf obey'd; and to this the Poet ſeems to allude in his Name *Moroſe*. Beſide this, I am aſſur'd from divers Perſons, that *Ben Johnſon* was actually acquainted with ſuch a Man, one altogether as ridiculous as he is here repreſented. Others ſay it is not enough to find one Man of ſuch an Humour; it muſt be common to more, and the more common the more natural. To prove this, they inſtance in the beſt of comical Characters, *Falſtaff*: There are many Men reſembling him; Old, Fat, Merry, Cowardly, Drunken, Amorous, Vain and Lying. But to convince theſe People, I need but tell them, that Humour is the ridiculous Extravagance of Converſation, wherein one Man differs from all others. If then it be common, or communicated to many, how differs it from other Mens? Or what indeed cauſes it to be ridiculous ſo much as the Singularity of it? As for *Falſtaff*, he is not properly one Humour, but a Miſcellany of Humours or Images, drawn from ſo many ſeveral Men: That wherein he is ſingular, is his Wit, or thoſe things he ſays, *præter expectatum*, unexpected

pected by the Audience; his quick Evasions when you imagine him surpriz'd, which as they are extremely diverting of themselves, so receive a great addition from his Person; for the very sight of such an unwieldy old debauch'd Fellow, is a Comedy alone. And here having a place so proper for it, I cannot but enlarge somewhat upon this Subject of Humour into which I am fallen. The Ancients have little of it in their Comedies; for the τὸ γελοῖον of the old Comedy, of which *Aristophanes* was chief, was not so much to imitate a Man, as to make the People laugh at some odd Conceit, which had commonly somewhat of unnatural or obscene in it. Thus when you see *Socrates* brought upon the Stage, you are not to imagine him made ridiculous by the Imitation of his Actions, but rather by making him perform something very unlike himself: Something so childish and absurd, as by comparing it with the Gravity of the true *Socrates*, makes a ridiculous Object for the Spectators. In their new Comedy which succeeded, the Poets sought indeed to express the ἦθος, as in their Tragedies the πάθος of Mankind. But this ἦθος contain'd only the general Characters of Men and Manners; as old Men, Lovers, Serving-men, Courtezans, Parasites, and such other Persons as we see in their Comedies, all which they made alike: That is, one old Man or Father, one Lover, one Courtezan so like another, as if the first of them had begot the rest of every sort: *Ex homine hunc natum dicas.* The same Custom they observ'd likewise in their Tragedies. As for the *French*, tho' they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have small use of it in their Comedies, or Farces; they being but ill Imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which stirr'd up Laughter in the old Comedy. But among the *English* 'tis otherwise: Where, by Humour is meant some extravagant Habit, Passion, or Affection, particular (as I said before) to some one Person: By the Oddness of which, he is immediately distinguish'd from the rest of Men; which being lively and naturally represented, most frequently begets that malicious Pleasure in the Audience which is testified by Laughter: As all things which

are Deviations from Customs are ever the aptest to produce it: Though by the way this Laughter is only accidental, as the Person represented is Fantastick or Bizarre; but Pleasure is essential to it, as the Imitation of what is natural. The Description of these Humours, drawn from the Knowledge and Observation of particular Persons, was the peculiar Genius and Talent of *Ben Johnson*; to whose Play I now return.

Besides *Morose*, there are at least, nine or ten different Characters and Humours in the *Silent Woman*, all which Persons have several Concernments of their own, yet all us'd by the Poet, to the conducting of the main Design to Perfection. I shall not waste time in commending the Writing of this Play, but I will give you my Opinion, that there is more Wit and Acuteness of Fancy in it than in any of *Ben Johnson*'s. Besides, that he has here describ'd the Conversation of Gentlemen in the Persons of *True-Wit*, and his Friends, with more Gaiety, Air, and Freedom than in the rest of his Comedies. For the Contrivance of the Plot, 'tis extream elaborate, and yet withal easy; for the λύσις, or untying it, 'tis so admirable, that when it is done, no one of the Audience would think the Poet could have miss'd it; and yet it was conceal'd so much before the last Scene, that any other Way would sooner have enter'd into your Thoughts. But I dare not take upon me to commend the Fabrick of it, because it is altogether so full of Art, that I must unravel every Scene in it to commend it as I ought. And this excellent Contrivance is still the more to be admir'd, because 'tis Comedy where the Persons are only of common Rank, and their Business private, not elevated by Passions or high Concernments, as in serious Plays. Here every one is a proper Judge of all he sees; nothing is represented but that with which he daily converses: So that by consequence all Faults lie open to discovery, and few are pardonable. 'Tis this which *Horace* has judiciously observ'd:

Creditur ex medio quia res arcessit, habere
Sudoris minimum; sed habet Comœdia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus. ———

But

But our Poet, who was not ignorant of these Difficulties, has made use of all Advantages; as he who designs a large Leap, takes his Rise from the highest Ground. One of these Advantages, is that which *Corneille* has laid down as the greatest which can arrive to any Poem, and which himself could never compass above thrice in all his Plays, *viz.* the making Choice of some signal and long-expected Day, whereon the Action of the Play is to depend. This Day was that design'd by *Dauphine*, for the settling of his Uncle's Estate upon him, which to compass he contrives to marry him: That the Marriage had been plotted by him long beforehand, is made evident, by what he tells *True-Wit* in the second Act, that in one Moment he had destroy'd what he had been raising many Months.

There is another Artifice of the Poet, which I cannot here omit, because by the frequent Practice of it in his Comedies, he has left it to us almost as a Rule; that is, when he has any Character or Humour wherein he would shew a *Coup de Maistre*, or his highest Skill; he recommends it to your Observation, by a pleasant Description of it before the Person first appears. Thus, in *Bartholomew-Fair*, he gives you the Pictures of *Numps* and *Cokes*, and in this, those of *Daw*, *Lasoole*, *Morose*, and the *Collegiate Ladies*; all which you hear describ'd before you see them. So that before they come upon the Stage you have a longing Expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favourably; and when they are there, even from their first Appearance you are so far acquainted with them, that nothing of their Humour is lost to you.

I will observe yet one thing further of this admirable Plot; the Business of it rises in every Act. The second is greater than the first; the third than the second, and so forward to the fifth. There too you see, till the very last Scene, new Difficulties arising to obstruct the Action of the Play; and when the Audience is brought into despair that the Business cannot naturally be effected; then, and not before, the Discovery is made. But that the Poet might entertain you with more Variety

all this while, he reserves some new Characters to show you, which he opens not till the second and third Act. In the second, *Morose*, *Daw*, the *Barber* and *Otter*; in the third, the *Collegiate Ladies*: All which he moves afterwards in By-walks, or under-Plots, as Diversions to the main Design, lest it should grow tedious, though they are still naturally join'd with it, and somewhere or other subservient to it. Thus, like a skilful Chess-player, by little and little, he draws out his Men, and makes his Pawns of use to his greater Persons.

If this Comedy, and some others of his, were translated into *French* Prose (which would now be no wonder to them, since *Moliere* has lately given them Plays out of Verse, which have not displeas'd them) I believe the Controversy would soon be decided betwixt the two Nations, even making them the Judges. But we need not call our Heroes to our Aid; Be it spoken to the Honour of the *English*, our Nation can never want in any Age such, who are able to dispute the Empire of Wit with any People in the Universe. And though the Fury of a Civil War, and Power, for twenty Years together, abandon'd to a barbarous Race of Men, Enemies of all good Learning, had buried the Muses under the Ruins of Monarchy; yet with the Restoration of our Happiness, we see reviv'd Poesy lifting up its Head, and already shaking off the Rubbish which lay so heavy on it. We have seen since his Majesty's Return, many Dramatick Poems which yield not to those of any foreign Nation, and which deserve all Laurels but the *English*. I will set aside Flattery and Envy: It cannot be deny'd but we have some little Blemish either in the Plot or Writing of all those Plays which have been made within these seven Years: (and perhaps there is no Nation in the World so quick to discern them, or so difficult to pardon them, as ours:) yet if we can persuade our selves to use the Candour of that Poet, who (though the most severe of Criticks) has left us this Caution by which to moderate our Censures;

——*Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis offendar maculis.*——

If

If in consideration of their many and great Beauties, we can wink at some slight and little Imperfections; if we, I say, can be thus equal to our selves, I ask no favour from the *French*. And if I do not venture upon any particular Judgment of our late Plays, 'tis out of the Consideration which an ancient Writer gives me; *Vivorum, ut magna admiratio, ita censura difficilis:* betwixt the Extremes of Admiration and Malice, 'tis hard to judge upright of the Living. Only I think it may be permitted me to say, that as it is no Lessening to us to yield to some Plays, and those not many of our own Nation in the last Age, so can it be no Addition to pronounce of our present Poets, that they have far surpass'd all the Ancients, and the Modern Writers of other Countries.

This was the Substance of what was then spoke on that Occasion; and *Lisideius*, I think, was going to reply, when he was prevented thus by *Crites:* I am confident, said he, that the most material things that can be said, have been already urg'd on either side; if they have not, I must beg of *Lisideius* that he will defer his Answer till another time: for I confess I have a joint Quarrel to you both, because you have concluded, without any Reason given for it, that Rhyme is proper for the Stage. I will not dispute how ancient it hath been among us to write this way; perhaps our Ancestors knew no better till *Shakespeare*'s time. I will grant it was not altogether left by him, and that *Fletcher* and *Ben Johnson* us'd it frequently in their Pastorals; and sometimes in other Plays. Farther, I will not argue whether we receiv'd it originally from our own Countrymen, or from the *French*; for that is an Inquiry of as little Benefit as theirs, who in the midst of the late Plague were not so sollicitous to provide against it, as to know whether we had it from the Malignity of our own Air, or by transportation from *Holland*. I have therefore only to affirm, That it is not allowable in serious Plays; for Comedies I find you already concluding with me. To prove this, I might satisfy my self to tell you, how much in vain it is for you to strive against the Stream of the Peoples

Inclination; the greatest part of which are prepossess'd so much with those excellent Plays of *Shakespeare*, *Fletcher*, and *Ben Johnson*, (which have been written out of Rhyme) that except you could bring them such as were written better in it, and those too by Persons of equal Reputation with them, it will be impossible for you to gain your Cause with them, who will still be Judges. This it is to which in fine all your Reasons must submit. The unanimous Consent of an Audience is so powerful, that even *Julius Cæsar* (as *Macrobius* reports of him) when he was perpetual Dictator, was not able to ballance it on the other side. But when *Laberius*, a *Roman* Knight, at his Request contended in the *Mime* with another Poet, he was forc'd to cry out, *Etiam favente me victus es Laberi.* But I will not, on this occasion, take the Advantage of the greater Number, but only urge such Reasons against Rhyme, as I find in the Writings of those who have argu'd for the other Way. First then, I am of Opinion, that Rhyme is unnatural in a Play, because Dialogue there is presented as the Effect of sudden Thought. For a Play is the Imitation of Nature, and since no Man, without Premeditation, speaks in Rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the Stage; this hinders not but the Fancy may be there elevated to an higher Pitch of Thought than it is in ordinary Discourse: For there is a Probability that Men of excellent and quick Parts may speak noble things *extempore*: But those Thoughts are never fetter'd with the Numbers or Sound of Verse, without Study; and therefore it cannot be but Unnatural to present the most free way of Speaking, in that which is the most constrain'd. For this Reason, says *Aristotle*, 'Tis best to write Tragedy in that Kind of Verse which is the least such, or which is neareſt Prose: And this amongst the Ancients was the Iambique, and with us is Blank Verse, or the Measure of Verse kept exactly, without Rhyme. These Numbers therefore are fittest for a Play; the others for a Paper of Verses, or a Poem; Blank Verse being as much below them, as Rhyme is improper for the *Drama*. And if it be objected, that neither are Blank Verses made *extempore*, yet

yet as neareſt Nature, they are ſtill to be preferr'd. But there are two particular Exceptions which many beſides my ſelf have had to Verſe; by which it will appear yet more plainly, how improper it is in Plays. And the firſt of them is grounded on that very Reaſon for which ſome have commended Rhyme: They ſay the Quickneſs of Repartees in argumentative Scenes receives an Ornament from Verſe. Now what is more unreaſonable than to imagine, that a Man ſhould not only imagine the Wit, but the Rhyme too upon the ſudden? This Nicking of him who ſpoke before both in Sound and Meaſure, is ſo great an Happineſs, that you muſt at leaſt ſuppoſe the Perſons of your Play to be born Poets, *Arcades omnes, & cantare pares & reſpondere parati,* they muſt have arriv'd to the degree of *quicquid conabar dicere,* to make Verſes almoſt whether they will or no: If they are any thing below this, it will look rather like the Deſign of two, than the Anſwer of one: It will appear that your Actors hold Intelligence together, that they perform their Tricks like Fortune-tellers, by Confederacy. The hand of Art will be too viſible in it againſt that Maxim of all Profeſſions: *Ars eſt celare artem,* That it is the greateſt Perfection of Art to keep it ſelf undiſcover'd. Nor will it ſerve you to object, that however you manage it, 'tis ſtill known to be a Play; and conſequently the Dialogue of two Perſons underſtood to be the Labour of one Poet. For a Play is ſtill an Imitation of Nature; we know we are to be deceiv'd, and we deſire to be ſo; but no Man ever was deceiv'd but with a probability of Truth, for who will ſuffer a groſs Lie to be faſten'd on him. Thus we ſufficiently underſtand that the Scenes which repreſent Cities and Countries to us, are not really ſuch, but only painted on Boards and Canvaſs: But ſhall that excuſe the ill Painture or Deſignment of them? Nay, rather, ought they not to be labour'd with ſo much the more Diligence and Exactneſs to help the Imagination, ſince the Mind of Man does naturally tend to Truth? and therefore the nearer any thing comes to the Imitation of it, the more it pleaſes.

Thus

Thus, you see, your Rhyme is uncapable of expressing the greatest Thoughts naturally, and the lowest it cannot with any Grace: For what is more unbefitting the Majesty of Verse, than to call a Servant, or bid a Door be shut in Rhyme? And yet you are often forc'd on this miserable Necessity. But Verse, you say, Circumscribes a quick and luxuriant Fancy, which would extend it self too far on every Subject, did not the Labour which is requir'd to well-turn'd and polish'd Rhyme, set Bounds to it. Yet this Argument, if granted, would only prove, that we may write better in Verse, but not more naturally. Neither is it able to evince that; for he who wants Judgment to confine his Fancy in Blank Verse, may want it as much in Rhyme; and he who has it, will avoid Errors in both kinds. *Latin* Verse was as great a Confinement to the Imagination of those Poets, as Rhyme to ours: And yet you find *Ovid* saying too much on every Subject. *Nescivit* (says *Seneca*) *quod bene cessit relinquere:* of which he gives you one famous Instance in his Description of the Deluge.

Omnia pontus erat, deerant quoque littora ponto.

"Now all was Sea, nor had that Sea a Shore." Thus *Ovid*'s Fancy was not limited by Verse, and *Virgil* needed not Verse to have bounded his.

In our own Language we see *Ben Johnson* confining himself to what ought to be said, even in the Liberty of Blank Verse; and yet *Corneille*, the most judicious of the *French* Poets, is still varying the same Sense an hundred ways, and dwelling eternally on the same Subject, though confin'd by Rhyme. Some other Exceptions I have to Verse, but since these I have nam'd are for the most part already publick, I conceive it reasonable they should first be answer'd.

It concerns me less than any, said *Neander*, (seeing he had ended) to reply to this Discourse; because when I should have prov'd, that Verse may be natural in Plays, yet I should always be ready to confess, that those which

I have written in this kind, come ſhort of that Perfection which is requir'd. Yet ſince you are pleas'd I ſhould undertake this Province, I will do it, though with all imaginable reſpect and deference, both to that Perſon from whom you have borrow'd your ſtrongeſt Arguments, and to whoſe Judgment, when I have ſaid all, I finally ſubmit. But before I proceed to anſwer your Objections, I muſt firſt remember you, that I exclude all Comedy from my Defence; and next, that I deny not but Blank Verſe may be alſo us'd, and content my ſelf only to aſſert, that in ſerious Plays, where the Subject and Characters are great, and the Plot unmix'd with Mirth, which might allay or divert theſe Concernments which are produc'd, Rhyme is there as natural, and more effectual than Blank Verſe.

And now having laid down this as a Foundation; to begin with *Crites*, I muſt crave leave to tell him, that ſome of his Arguments againſt Rhyme reach no farther than, from the Faults or Defects of ill Rhyme, to conclude againſt the Uſe of it in general. May not I conclude againſt Blank Verſe by the ſame Reaſon? If the Words of ſome Poets who write in it, are either ill choſen, or ill placed, (which makes not only Rhyme, but all kind of Verſe in any Language unnatural;) Shall I, for their vicious Affectation, condemn thoſe excellent Lines of *Fletcher*, which are written in that kind? Is there any thing in Rhyme more conſtrain'd than this Line in Blank Verſe? *I Heav'n invoke, and ſtrong reſiſtance make*; where you ſee both the Clauſes are plac'd unnaturally; that is, contrary to the common way of Speaking, and that without the Excuſe of a Rhyme to cauſe it: Yet you would think me very ridiculous, if I ſhould accuſe the Stubbornneſs of Blank Verſe for this, and not rather the Stiffneſs of the Poet. Therefore, *Crites*, you muſt either prove that Words, though well choſen, and duly plac'd, yet render not Rhyme natural in it ſelf; or that however natural and eaſie the Rhyme may be, yet it is not proper for a Play. If you inſiſt on the former Part, I would ask you what other Conditions are requir'd to make Rhyme natural in it ſelf, beſides an E-

lection

lection of apt Words, and a right Disposition of them? For the due Choice of your Words expresses your Sense naturally, and the due Placing them adapts the Rhyme to it. If you object, that one Verse may be made for the sake of another, though both the Words and Rhyme be apt: I answer, it cannot possibly so fall out; for either there is a Dependance of Sense betwixt the first Line and the second, or there is none: If there be that Connection, then in the natural Position of the Words, the latter Line must of necessity flow from the former: If there be no Dependance, yet still the due Ordering of Words makes the last Line as natural in it self as the other: So that the Necessity of a Rhyme never forces any but bad or lazy Writers to say what they would not otherwise. 'Tis true, there is both Care and Art requir'd to write in Verse; A good Poet never establishes the first Line, till he has sought out such a Rhyme as may fit the Sense, already prepar'd to heighten the second: Many times the Close of the Sense falls into the middle of the next Verse, or farther off, and he may often prevail himself of the same Advantages in *English* which *Virgil* had in *Latin*, he may break off in the *Hemistich*, and begin another Line; Indeed, the not observing these two last things, makes Plays which are writ in Verse, so tedious: For though, most commonly, the Sense is to be confin'd to the Couplet, yet nothing that does *perpetuo tenore fluere*, run in the same Channel, can please always. 'Tis like the Murmuring of a Stream, which not varying in the Fall, causes at first Attention, at last Drowsiness. Variety of Cadences is the best Rule, the greatest Help to the Actors, and Refreshment to the Audience.

If then Verse may be made natural in it self, how becomes it unnatural in a Play? You say the Stage is the Representation of Nature, and no Man in ordinary Conversation speaks in Rhyme. But you foresaw, when you said this, that it might be answer'd; neither does any Man speak in Blank Verse, or in Measure without Rhyme. Therefore you concluded, that which is nearest Nature is still to be preferr'd. But you took no notice,

tice, that Rhyme might be made as natural as Blank Verse, by the well placing of the Words, &c. all the Difference between them, when they are both correct, is the Sound in one, which the other wants; and if so, the Sweetness of it, and all the Advantage resulting from it, which are handled in the Preface to the *Rival Ladies*, will yet stand good. As for that place of *Aristotle*, where he says Plays should be writ in that kind of Verse which is neareſt Prose; it makes little for you, Blank Verse being properly but measur'd Prose. Now Measure alone in any modern Language, does not constitute Verse; those of the Ancients in *Greek* and *Latin*, consisted in Quantity of Words, and a determinate Number of Feet. But when, by the Inundation of the *Goths* and *Vandals* into *Italy*, new Languages were introduced, and barbarously mingled with the *Latin* (of which the *Italian*, *Spanish*, *French*, and ours, (made out of them, and the *Teutonick*) are Dialects: a new way of Poesie was practis'd; new, I say, in those Countries, for in all probability it was that of the Conquerors in their own Nations: At least we are able to prove, that the Eastern People have us'd it from all Antiquity, *Vid.* Dan. *his Defence of Rhyme*. This new Way consisted in Measure or Number of Feet and Rhyme. The Sweetness of Rhyme, and Observation of Accent, supplying the place of Quantity in Words, which could neither exactly be observ'd by those *Barbarians* who knew not the Rules of it, neither was it suitable to their Tongues as it had been to the *Greek* and *Latin*. No Man is tied in Modern Poesie to observe any farther Rule in the Feet of his Verse, but that they be Dissyllables; whether *Spondee*, *Trochee*, or *Iambique*, it matters not; only he is obliged to Rhyme: Neither do the *Spanish*, *French*, *Italian*, or *Germans*, acknowledge at all, or very rarely, any such kind of Poesie as Blank Verse amongst them. Therefore at most, 'tis but a Poetick Prose, a *Sermo pedestris*, and, as such, most fit for Comedies, where I acknowledge Rhyme to be improper. Farther, As to that Quotation of *Aristotle*, our Couplet Verses may be rendred as near Prose as Blank Verse it self, by using those Advantages,

tages I lately nam'd, as Breaks in an Hemistich, or running the Sense into another Line, thereby making Art and Order appear as loose and free as Nature; or not tying our selves to Couplets strictly, we may use the Benefit of the Pindarick way, practis'd in the Siege of *Rhodes*; where the Numbers vary, and the Rhyme is dispos'd carelesly, and far from often Chyming. Neither is that other Advantage of the Ancients to be despis'd, of changing the Kind of Verse when they please, with the Change of the Scene, or some new Entrance: For they confine not themselves always to *Iambiques*, but extend their Liberty to all *Lyrique* Numbers, and sometimes even to *Hexameter*. But I need not go so far to prove that Rhyme, as it succeeds to all other Offices of *Greek* and *Latin* Verse, so especially to this of Plays, since the Custom of Nations at this Day confirms it, the *French*, *Italian*, and *Spanish* Tragedies are generally writ in it, and sure the universal Consent of the most civiliz'd Parts of the World, ought in this, as it doth in other Customs, to include the rest.

But perhaps you may tell me I have propos'd such a Way to make Rhyme natural, and consequently proper to Plays, as is unpracticable, and that I shall scarce find six or eight Lines together in any Play, where the Words are so plac'd and chosen as is requir'd to make it natural. I answer, No Poet need constrain himself at all times to it. It is enough he makes it his general Rule; for I deny not but sometimes there may be a Greatness in placing the Words otherwise; and sometimes they may sound better, sometimes also the Variety it self is Excuse enough. But if, for the most part, the Words be plac'd as they are in the Negligence of Prose, it is sufficient to denominate the Way practicable; for we esteem that to be such, which in the Tryal oftner succeeds than misses. And thus far you may find the Practice made good in many Plays; where you do not, remember still, that if you cannot find six natural Rhymes together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many Lines in Blank Verse, even among the greatest of our Poets, against which I cannot make some reasonable Exception.

And

And this, Sir, calls to my remembrance the beginning of your Discourse, where you told us we should never find the Audience favourable to this Kind of Writing, 'till we could produce as good Plays in Rhyme, as *Ben Johnson*, *Fletcher*, and *Shakespear*, had writ out of it. But it is to raise Envy to the Living, to compare them with the Dead. They are honour'd, and almost adored by us, as they deserve; neither do I know any so presumptuous of themselves as to contend with them. Yet give me leave to say thus much, without Injury to their Ashes, that not only we shall never equal them, but they could never equal themselves, were they to rise and write again. We acknowledge them our Fathers in Wit, but they have ruin'd their Estates themselves before they came to their Childrens Hands. There is scarce an Humour, a Character, or any kind of Plot, which they have not us'd. All comes sullied or wasted to us: And were they to entertain this Age, they could not now make so plenteous Treatments out of such decay'd Fortunes. This therefore will be a good Argument to us either not to write at all, or to attempt some other way. There is no Bays to be expected in their Walks; *Tentanda via est, quâ me quoque possim tollere humo.*

This way of writing in Verse, they have only left free to us; our Age is arriv'd to a Perfection in it, which they never knew; and which (if we may guess by what of theirs we have seen in Verse, as the *Faithful Shepherdess*, and *Sad Shepherd*:) 'tis probable they never could have reach'd. For the Genius of every Age is different: And though ours excel in this, I deny not but that to imitate Nature in that Perfection which they did in Prose, is a greater Commendation than to write in Verse exactly. As for what you have added, that the People are not generally inclin'd to like this Way: if it were true, it would be no wonder, that betwixt the shaking off an old Habit, and the introducing of a new, there should be Difficulty. Do we not see them stick to *Hopkins* and *Sternhold*'s Psalms, and forsake those of *David*, I mean *Sandys*'s Translation of them? If by the People, you understand the Multitude, the οἱ πολλοὶ, 'tis no matter what

what they think; they are sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong; their Judgment is a meer Lottery. *Est ubi plebs rectè putat, est ubi peccat.* *Horace* says it of the Vulgar, judging Poesy. But if you mean the mix'd Audience of the Populace and the Nobless, I dare confidently affirm, that a great Part of the latter Sort are already favourable to Verse; and that no serious Play, written since the King's Return, have been more kindly receiv'd by them, than the Siege of *Rhodes*, the *Mustapha*, the *Indian* Queen, and *Indian* Emperor.

But I come now to the Inference of your first Argument. You said, that the Dialogue of Plays is presented as the Effect of sudden Thought, but no Man speaks suddenly, or *extempore* in Rhyme: And you inferr'd from thence, that Rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to Epique Poesy, cannot equally be proper to Dramatick, unless we could suppose all Men born so much more than Poets, that Verses should be made in them, not by them.

It has been formerly urg'd by you, and confess'd by me, that since no Man spoke any kind of Verse *extempore*, that which was neareſt Nature was to be preferr'd. I answer you therefore, by distinguishing betwixt what is neareſt to the Nature of Comedy, which is the Imitation of common Persons and ordinary Speaking, and what is neareſt the Nature of a serious Play: This last is indeed the Representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to a higher Pitch. The Plot, the Characters, the Wit, the Passions, the Descriptions, are all exalted above the Level of common Converse, as high as the Imagination of the Poet can carry them, with proportion to Verisimility. Tragedy we know is wont to image to us the Minds and Fortunes of Noble Persons, and to pourtray these exactly; Heroick Rhyme is neareſt Nature, as being the noblest Kind of modern Verse.

Indignatur enim privatis, & prope socco
Dignis carminibus, narrari cœna Thyestæ. (says *Horace.*)

And in another place,

Effutire leves indigna tragœdia versus.

Blank

Blank Verse is acknowledg'd to be too low for a Poem; nay more, for a Paper of Verses; but if too low for an ordinary Sonnet, how much more for Tragedy, which is by *Aristotle*, in the Dispute betwixt the Epick Poesy and the Dramatick, for many Reasons he there alledges, rank'd above it!

But setting this Defence aside, your Argument is almost as strong against the Use of Rhyme in Poems as in Plays; for the Epick way is every where interlac'd with Dialogue, or discoursive Scenes; and therefore you must either grant Rhyme to be improper there, which is contrary to your Assertion, or admit it into Plays by the same Title which you have given it to Poems. For though Tragedy be justly preferr'd above the other, yet there is a great Affinity between them, as may easily be discovered in that Definition of a Play which *Lisideius* gave us. The Genius of them is the same, a just and lively Image of Human Nature, in its Actions, Passions, and Traverses of Fortune: So is the End, namely for the Delight and Benefit of Mankind. The Characters and Persons are still the same, *viz.* the greatest of both Sorts, only the Manner of acquainting us with those Actions, Passions and Fortunes is different. Tragedy performs it *viva voce*, or by Action, in Dialogue; wherein it excels the Epick Poem, which does it chiefly by Narration, and therefore is not so lively an Image of Human Nature. However, the Agreement betwixt them is such, that if Rhyme be proper for one, it must be for the other. Verse, 'tis true, is not the Effect of sudden Thought: but this hinders not that sudden Thought may be represented in Verse, since those Thoughts are such as must be higher than Nature can raise them without Premeditation, especially to a Continuance of them even out of Verse, and consequently you cannot imagine them to have been sudden either in the Poet, or the Actors. A Play, as I have said, to be like Nature, is to be set above it; as Statues which are plac'd on high are made greater than the Life, that they may descend to the Sight in their just Proportion.

Perhaps

Perhaps I have insisted too long on this Objection; but the clearing of it will make my stay shorter on the rest. You tell us, *Crites*, that Rhyme appears most unnatural in Repartees, or short Replies: When he who answers, (it being presum'd he knew not what the other would say, yet) makes up that part of the Verse which was left incompleat, and supplies both the Sound and Measure of it. This, you say, looks rather like the Confederacy of two, than the Answer of one.

This, I confess, is an Objection which is in every Man's Mouth who loves the Rhyme: But suppose, I beseech you, the Repartee were made only in Blank Verse, might not part of the same Argument be turn'd against you? For the Measure is as often supply'd there, as it is in Rhyme. The latter Half of the Hemistich as commonly made up, or a second Line subjoin'd, as a Reply to the former; which any one Leaf in *Johnson*'s Plays will sufficiently clear to you. You will often find in the *Greek* Tragedians, and in *Seneca*, that when a Scene grows up into the warmth of Repartees, (which is the close fighting of it) the latter part of the Trimeter is supply'd by him who answers; and yet it was never observ'd as a Fault in them by any of the Ancient or Modern Criticks. The Case is the same in our Verse as it was in theirs; Rhyme to us being in lieu of Quantity to them. But if no Latitude is to be allow'd a Poet, you take from him not only his Licence of *quidlibet audendi*, but you tie him up in a straighter Compass than you would a Philosopher. This is indeed *Musas colere severiores*: You would have him follow Nature, but he must follow her on Foot: You have dismounted him from his *Pegasus*. But you tell us, this supplying the last Half of a Verse, or adjoining a whole Second to the former, looks more like the Design of two, than the Answer of one. Suppose we acknowledge it: How comes this Confederacy to be more displeasing to you than in a Dance which is well contriv'd? You see there the united Design of many Persons to make up one Figure: After they have separated themselves in many petty Divisions, they rejoin one by one into a Gross: The Confederacy is plain amongst them; for

for Chance could never produce any thing ſo beautiful, and yet there is nothing in it that ſhocks your Sight. I acknowledge the Hand of Art appears in Repartee, as of neceſſity it muſt in all kind of Verſe. But there is alſo the quick and poinant Brevity of it (which is an high Imitation of Nature in thoſe ſudden Guſts of Paſſion) to mingle with it: And this, join'd with the Cadency and Sweetneſs of the Rhyme, leaves nothing in the Soul of the Hearer to deſire. 'Tis an Art which appears; but it appears only like the Shadowings of Painture, which being to cauſe the Rounding of it, cannot be abſent: but while that is conſidered, they are loſt: So while we attend to the other Beauties of the Matter, the Care and Labour of the Rhyme is carried from us, or at leaſt drown'd in its own Sweetneſs, as Bees are ſometimes buried in their Honey. When a Poet has found the Repartee, the laſt Perfection he can add to it, is, to put it into Verſe. However good the Thought may be; however apt the Words in which 'tis couch'd, yet he finds himſelf at a little unreſt, while Rhyme is wanting: He cannot leave it 'till that comes naturally, and then is at eaſe, and ſits down contented.

From Replies, which are the moſt elevated Thoughts of Verſe, you paſs to thoſe which are moſt mean, and which are common with the loweſt of houſhold Converſation. In theſe, you ſay, the Majeſty of Verſe ſuffers. You inſtance in the calling of a Servant, or commanding a Door to be ſhut, in Rhyme. This, *Crites*, is a good Obſervation of yours, but no Argument: For it proves no more but that ſuch Thoughts ſhould be wav'd, as often as may be, by the Addreſs of the Poet. But ſuppoſe they are neceſſary in the Places where he uſes them, yet there is no need to put them into Rhyme. He may place them in the Beginning of a Verſe, and break it off, as unfit, when ſo debas'd, for any other Uſe: Or granting the worſt, that they require more Room than the Hemiſtich will allow, yet ſtill there is a Choice to be made of the beſt Words, and leaſt vulgar (provided they be apt) to expreſs ſuch Thoughts. Many have blam'd Rhyme in general, for this Fault, when the Poet, with a little Care,

might

might have redreſs'd it. But they do it with no more Juſtice, than if *Engliſh* Poeſy ſhould be made ridiculous for the ſake of the Water-Poet's Rhymes. Our Language is noble, full, and ſignificant; and I know not why he who is Maſter of it, may not cloath ordinary things in it as decently as the *Latin*; if he uſe the ſame Diligence in his Choice of Words.

Delectus Verborum Origo eſt Eloquentiæ.

It was the Saying of *Julius Cæſar*, one ſo curious in his, that none of them can be chang'd but for a worſe. One would think, *unlock the Door* was a thing as vulgar as could be ſpoken, and yet *Seneca* could make it ſound high and lofty in his Latin.——

Reſerate cluſos Regii poſtes Laris.

Set wide the Palace Gates.

But I turn from this Exception, both becauſe it happens not above twice or thrice in any Play that thoſe vulgar Thoughts are us'd; and then too (were there no other Apology to be made, yet) the Neceſſity of them (which is alike in all like kind of writing) may excuſe them. For if they are little and mean in Rhyme, they are of conſequence ſuch in Blank Verſe. Beſides that the great Eagerneſs, and Precipitation, with which they are ſpoken, makes us rather mind the Subſtance than the Dreſs; that for which they are ſpoken, rather than what is ſpoke. For they are always the Effect of ſome haſty Concernment, and ſomething of Conſequence depends on them.

Thus, *Crites*, I have endeavour'd to anſwer your Objections; it remains only that I ſhould vindicate an Argument for Verſe, which you have gone about to overthrow. It had formerly been ſaid, that the Eaſineſs of Blank Verſe renders the Poet too luxuriant; but that the Labour of Rhyme bounds and circumſcribes an over-fruitful Fancy. The Scene there being commonly confin'd to the Couplet, and the Words ſo order'd that the Rhyme naturally

naturally follows them, not they the Rhyme. To this you answer'd, That it was no Argument to the Question in hand, for the Dispute was not which way a Man may write best; but which is most proper for the Subject on which he writes.

First, give me leave, Sir, to remember you, that the Argument against which you rais'd this Objection, was only secondary: It was built on this *Hypothesis*, that to write in Verse was proper for serious Plays. Which Supposition being granted (as it was briefly made out in that Discourse, by shewing how Verse might be made natural) it asserted, that this way of writing was an help to the Poet's Judgment, by putting Bounds to a wild over-flowing Fancy. I think therefore it will not be hard for me to make good what it was to prove on that Supposition. But you add, that were this let pass, yet he who wants Judgment in the Liberty of his Fancy, may as well shew the Defect of it when he is confin'd to Verse: For he who has Judgment will avoid Errors; and he who has it not, will commit them in all Kinds of Writing.

This Argument, as you have taken it from a most acute Person, so, I confess, it carries much Weight in it. But by using the word *Judgment* here indefinitely, you seem to have put a Fallacy upon us: I grant he who has Judgment, that is, so profound, so strong, or rather so infallible a Judgment, that he needs no Helps to keep it always pois'd and upright, will commit no Faults either in Rhyme or out of it. And on the other Extream, he who has a Judgment so weak and craz'd, that no Helps can correct or amend it, shall write scurvily out of Rhyme, and worse in it. But the first of these Judgments is no where to be found, and the latter is not fit to write at all. To speak therefore of Judgment as it is in the best Poets: They who have the greatest Proportion of it, want other Helps than from it within. As for Example, you would be loth to say, that he who is indued with a sound Judgment has no need of History, Geography, or Moral Philosophy, to write correctly. Judgment is indeed the Master-workman in a Play: But he requires many

ny ſubordinate Hands, many Tools to his Aſſiſtance. And Verſe I affirm to be one of theſe: 'Tis a Rule and Line by which he keeps his Building compact and even, which otherwiſe lawleſs Imagination would raiſe either irregularly or looſly. At leaſt if the Poet commits Errors with this Help, he would make greater and more without it: 'Tis (in ſhort) a ſlow and painful, but the ſureſt Kind of Working. *Ovid*, whom you accuſe for Luxuriancy in Verſe, had perhaps been farther guilty of it, had he writ in Proſe. And for your Inſtance of *Ben Johnſon*, who, you ſay, writ exactly without the Help of Rhyme; you are to remember 'tis only an Aid to a luxuriant Fancy, which his was not: As he did not want Imagination, ſo none ever ſaid he had much to ſpare. Neither was Verſe then refin'd ſo much, to be an Help to that Age, as it is to ours. Thus then the ſecond Thoughts being uſually the beſt, as receiving the matureſt Digeſtion from Judgment, and the laſt and moſt mature Product of thoſe Thoughts being artfully and labour'd Verſe, it may well be inferr'd, that Verſe is a great Help to a luxuriant Fancy; and this is what that Argument which you oppos'd, was to evince.

Neander was purſuing this Diſcourſe ſo eagerly, that *Eugenius* had call'd to him twice or thrice ere he took notice that the Barge ſtood ſtill, and that they were at the Foot of *Somerſet*-Stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The Company were all ſorry to ſeparate ſo ſoon, tho' a great part of the Evening was already ſpent; and ſtood a-while looking back on the Water, upon which the Moon-beams play'd, and made it appear like floating Quick-ſilver: At laſt they went up thro' a Crowd of *French* People, who were merrily dancing in the open Air, and nothing concern'd for the noiſe of Guns, which had alarm'd the Town that Afternoon. Walking thence together to the *Piazza*, they parted there; *Eugenius* and *Liſideius* to ſome pleaſant Appointment they had made, and *Crites* and *Neander* to their ſeveral Lodgings.